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## PAULINE GLIMPSES

(In the Year of the Word of God and St. Paul)

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Edited by  
Assisi Saldanha

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## Pauline Glimpses

(In the Year of the Word of God and St. Paul)

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## Editorial

In the year of the Word of God and of St. Paul, we bring to you some important Pauline themes. Even before the gospels can record for us the central events of our Christian faith, namely the Resurrection and the gift of the Eucharist, we have them by Paul. They are first hand accounts unlike the gospels which have come to us through various filters of oral tradition. Next, the issue of Pauline privilege and mixed marriages is quite relevant today as we break ethnic, linguistic, cultural and even religious barriers in a globalized world. Again, Paul has often been blamed of being anti-women and therefore it is only right we read him again so that we set aside all misconceptions in this regard. Finally, hope is what we need to inculcate in ourselves as we face a very troubled and dangerous world. Hope is a Pauline word and by it he reassures us of God's power even today. We have five articles in this volume, this time written by scholars from Bangalore and Chennai.

The first article entitled, Rejoicing in Hope... (Romans 12:12) by Dr. Prema Vakayil, CSST, proclaims hope as God's "no" to the power of death. The author presents hope as both radical and inclusive bearing within itself all the present contradictions of life in the firm conviction that God will bring to pass all that has been promised. This hope is particularly visible in the ministry of Jesus who reached out to all; the marginalized and the outcasts are brought to God's banqueting table. It is interesting how the author calls despair and presumption as the two biggest distortions of hope as they are both based on faulty views of God and man. In a culture of death which we face today, we need the Pauline view on hope as both an eschatological and a pragmatic key.

The second article is Paul and Women Revisited by Dr. Raj Irudaya, S.J. Here the author tries to clear the misconceptions surrounding Paul's teaching on women. He points out that Paul really cared about a radical vision of humanity based on the teaching that all humans

are equal before and in God (Gal 3:28). If so, how could he present women as inferior to men? The author asks for a hermeneutical reading of Paul that will unravel the depths of meaning implied by Paul in his writings on women. The author then undertakes a re-reading of Eph 5:21-33 as a test case and ends on the note that Paul must be reinterpreted for today.

The third article, namely, *The Pauline Privilege in the Context of 1Cor 7* by Dr. Assisi Saldanha, C.Ss.R., addresses the first of the Corinthian concerns, namely the question of marriage. Paul by clearly highlighting the Lord's command concerning the unity and indissolubility of marriage distinguishes it from his own opinion. In the light of his opinion Paul provides the rationale behind the *status quo* he wants maintained and the exception he is willing to grant. The key to understanding his emphasis on *status quo*, however, is his eschatology. Finally, it is in the context of 1Cor 7, that the question of the Pauline privilege is discussed.

The fourth article is on *Eating the Lord's Supper and Christian Unity (1 Cor 11:17-34)* by Dr. James Kurianal. The author on the basis of sociological analysis suggests that the issue Paul addresses in 1 Cor 11:17-34 is primarily social cohesiveness and not a theological dispute. It is a problem of social relationships having gone awry. The "Lord's Supper" has been turned by the Corinthians into "their own meal." The author analyzes important words and phrases in the context that help illumine the text under consideration. The result is that we have a powerful social message that makes the Eucharist the source of unity to which all Christians are invited.

The final article on *Bodily Resurrection: A Theological Reflection from the Perspective of 1 Cor 15: 12-58* by Dr. John Peter S. presents 1 Cor 15 as a powerful discourse which treats of the "theology of the resurrection of the dead." The truth of the resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of all Christian belief. Using examples from the process of nature, Paul clarifies the notion of the resurrection of the human body. The author points out that in a consumerist world of secularism and agnosticism that seems to be denying a life after death, Paul confronts us with the good news of our own bodily resurrection.



# Rejoicing in Hope... (Romans 12:12)

Prema Vakayil

The author shows that hope in the New Testament is basically a Pauline notion. It makes a radical disjunction with the present order, offending common sense and reversing this world's values. It proclaims God's "no" to the power of death. The Pauline idea of hope is at once radical and inclusive bearing within itself all the present contradictions of life in the firm conviction that God will bring to pass all that has been promised. Particularly, this hope insists that all persons are within a scope of God's love and care and within the scope of Christ's concern. Jesus' ministry reached out to all; the marginalized and the outcasts are brought to God's banqueting table. However, in the world of today, the two biggest distortions of hope are despair and presumption. As dissimilar as they appear, they are both forms of hopelessness and, therefore, sins against hope. Both are based on faulty views of God and man. In a culture of death which we face today, the author presents hope as both an eschatological and a pragmatic key.

## Introduction

"Rejoice in Hope." How strange this sounds! How are we to "eat" this message (Jer 15:16)? We live in a world so shattered and broken by violence. The "whole inhabited world" (*oikoumene*) is full of the desperately poor, starving children, people uprooted from their homes, and innocent victims of war and ethnic conflict. The threat of nuclear extinction still hangs like a cloud on our horizon and our planet is in the grip of an ecological crisis. How can we rejoice in hope?

### 1. Locating the Text Rom 12:12

Having set forth in a logical fashion the great doctrines of Christian faith, namely, the life in the Spirit a Christian is called to in Rom 8,

followed by the unchangeable nature of God's promise to the Jews in Rom 9-11, Paul proceeds in Rom 12 to give a series of practical exhortations which indicate how Christian believers ought to live. These exhortations are largely summarized in vv 1-2 and these can be more or less brought under a general heading "love in action."

The short verse of Rom 12:12 is part of the three pairs of exhortations that forms the whole of vv 11-12:

- |                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> pair: vv. 11ab    | Be not slack in zeal. Be aglow with the Spirit |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> pair: vv. 11c-12a | Serve the Lord. Rejoice in your hope           |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> pair: vv. 12 bc   | In tribulation endure. Persevere in prayer     |

## 2 Retaining the Order of Rom 12

If we retain the order and the verbs of the original we get a more lively reading:

- "in hope, rejoicing;  
in tribulation, enduring;  
in prayer, persevering."

Each of these exercises helps the other. If our "hope" of glory is so assured that it is a rejoicing hope, we shall find the spirit of "endurance in tribulation" natural and easy; but since it is "prayer" which strengthens the faith that begets hope and lifts it up into an assured and joyful expectancy, and since our patience in tribulation is fed by this, it will be seen that all depends on our "perseverance in prayer." Perseverance in prayer again is based on the forward looking character of Hope. Hence our focus is on the rejoicing in hope.

## 3. Hope: A Pauline Term

In the New Testament the term *elpis* and *elpizō* occur most frequently in Paul, some 40 times in the undisputed Pauline letters; in the other books they occur less frequently or only occasionally. Thus hope in the New Testament is basically a Pauline notion.<sup>1</sup> The majority of occurrences of *elpis* and *elpizō* in Paul have a religious sense. It is generally proclaimed by Paul as the expectation of the full revelation and the consummation of what has been begun. Paul's understanding

1 E. Wong, "1 Corinthians 13: 7 and Christian Hope," *LvSt* 17 (1992) 236.



of hope is dependent more on the Hebrew concept of hope than the Greek.<sup>2</sup>

#### 4. Biblical Background of Pauline Hope

##### a) *The Term*

Paul uses the word *elpis* in the Hebrew sense of confident trust (sure for better things) rather than in the Greek sense of tentative expectation (hoping for better things). The LXX uses *elpizein* (*elpis*) when it translates the Hebrew. For e.g., *elpizein* is used 47 times for *bātah*; *elpis* is used 7 times for *bātah*. Nine times it translates *mibetah* and 14 times *betah*.<sup>3</sup> There is something characteristic here. Unlike the Greek understanding, in the OT there is no neutral concept of expectation.<sup>4</sup> Hope itself is thus differentiated linguistically from fear of the future. Hope as expectation of the good is closely connected with trust and expectation is also yearning, in which the element of patient waiting or fleeing from refuge is emphasized. Hope is thus hope of the good and so long as there is life there is hope. (Eccl 9:4). But this hope is not a consoling dream of the imagination which causes us to forget our present troubles, nor are we warned of its uncertainty as in the Greek world. The life of the righteous is grounded in hope. To have hope, to have a future is a sign that things are well with us (Prov 23: 18; 24:14; 26:12; Job 11:18). Paul here may be deliberately recalling earlier and more developed words of encouragement, or was following familiar parenetical sequences. In vv. 12a and 12 b the thought is obviously very close to that of 5:2-5, and a similar progression of thought to that in 8:24-27 is evident in vv. 12a, 12c (hope, prayer). Clearly implicit also is both the sense of eschatological excitement (rejoicing) and the note of eschatological reserve ("in hope"); cf. 15:13 and 1 Thess 2:19.

2 *Elpis* in its classic Greek sense where the "uncertainty of the future is fundamental to the concept of *elpis*, which regularly means simply expectation with *elpizō* often used in the sense of fearing evil and *elpis* as experienced within the Jewish tradition. In the OT however, hope is something different from fear, hope is expectation of good."

3 G. Kittel, "elpis k.t.l.," in *TDNT*, 2.521-523.

4 The Greeks understand hope as expectation. An expectation is either good or bad and therefore it is either hope or fear. See *TDNT*, 2.517-519.

The Bible is, in many ways, the story of humans on the way to their final home. In the Old Testament there is growing hope for the kingdom of God and for an eternal covenant that would be established by the coming Messiah. Although this Old Testament hope is always rooted in dependence on God and his promises, it is also focused on material prosperity, freedom from political oppression, and the gift of numerous descendants.

### *i. The Promised Land*

Gradually in Scripture there comes the realization or the revelation that there is an afterlife beyond this earthly realm. There is hope for the restoration of the Davidic kingdom, the promised Messiah, and the resurrection of the dead. "God revealed the resurrection of the dead to his people progressively," the *Catechism* states. "Hope in the bodily resurrection of the dead established itself as a consequence intrinsic to faith in God as creator of the whole man, soul and body."<sup>5</sup> In the century or so prior to the birth of Jesus, the book of Wisdom speculated about the afterlife and its promise of hope for the righteous man persecuted by apostate Jews. It did not contemplate the specific nature of heaven. It was enough that it existed.

### *ii. Incarnation*

The specifics came with the Incarnation. Jesus often spoke of the coming kingdom of God in which those who shared in his life would become adopted children of the Father. The Beatitudes are filled with specific reasons for hope, pointing beyond earthly bounds to a new Promised Land.

St. Paul wrote about the hope of glory established in, by, and through Jesus Christ:

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us (Rom. 5:1-5).

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5 *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) 992.*

Hope is not only central to the Christian life; it is also a distinctive mark of the Christian view of life, death, and history. Christian hope, in fact, is a scandal and an offense to the skeptic, the agnostic, and the atheist. It is an affront to forms of Christianity that exist only as systems of morality without any basis in the actual source of Christian hope - the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which conquers the great enemy of man: death.

### 5. "Rejoicing in Hope": Living in and by the Promise of God

The NEB translates the phrase as "let hope keep you joyful." The phrase *tē(i) elpidi chairontes* causes a problem in translation because one may read it as 'rejoicing in' or "rejoice in." Since the dative can contain both senses we should not push for a choice between a local dative (rejoice in) and an instrumental dative ("rejoice by virtue of "). Paul here may be deliberately recalling earlier and more developed words of encouragement, or was following familiar parenetical sentences.<sup>6</sup>

In the vision of Paul, joy and hope together form a structure of Christian response to God's gracious acts; two life impulses, dynamically inter-related mutually nurturing and resulting from the other; certainly hope for the future is the source and conformation of our joy in the present. But it is striking that Paul in Rom 15:13 identifies our present joy rooted in the present experience of believers who rejoice in receiving the Holy Spirit. Several qualities of hope are helpful for our reflection.

#### a) *Radical Nature of Hope*

The hope which we are called to is a radical hope. It is rooted in God's raising Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy spirit from the dead (Rom 1:4). Such an act is the exact opposite of something to be predicted by clever analysis of the present or present trends. It makes

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6 In vv. 12a and 12b the thought is obviously very close to that of 5: 2-5 and a similar progression of thought to that in 8:24-27 is evident in vv. 12a, 12c (hope, prayer). Clearly implicit also is both the sense of eschatological excitement ("rejoicing") and the note of eschatological reserve ("in hope"); cf. 15:13 and 1 Thess 2:19. For joy as a characteristic of earliest Christianity, cf. also e.g., 14:17; 15:15; 2 Cor 6:10; Gal 5:22; Phil 1:4, 25; 2:17-18; 3:1; 4:1,4; 1 Thess 3:9; 5:16; Acts 2:46; 13:52; 1 Pet 1:8; 1 Jn 1:4.



a radical disjunction with the present order, offending common sense and reversing this world's values. It will be looked upon as a stumbling block and foolishness (cf. Mk 8:31-38; 9: 30-41; 10:32-45; 1 Cor 1:22-25). In particular it is not presented in the biblical account as an example of renewal according to the cycle of nature with each coming new year, as spring follows upon fall and winter; rather it proclaims God's "no" to fundamental power of that cycle, the power of death itself. This is why Paul understands the resurrection as an act of new creation, reversing death's ascendancy and why he views Christ as the new Adam.

### ***b) Hope is Inclusive***

The hope to which we are called is an inclusive hope. Biblically it is rooted in the vision of Christ as the in-cohering principle of all creation (Eph 1:10). Theologically it is rooted in the vision of the sacred Trinity, a re-visioning of the divine, not in terms of hierarchy and subordination but a loving, equal interdependent, mutual and reciprocal relationships, a vision which is not static and fixed but dynamic and lively, hence life giving. This inclusive hope insists that all persons are within a scope of God's love and care and within the scope of Christ's concern. Jesus' ministry reached out to all; the marginalized and the outcasts are brought to God's banqueting table (Lk 14:15-35; 14:13). This resonates with and amplifies the OT insistence on the inclusion of the excluded as an essential mark of the just community which God requires for God's people (Deut 14: 28-29; 16:14; 26:13). For many in the NT image of the household of faith conveys powerfully the inclusiveness of Christian Hope

### ***c) A Longing for the Vision of God***

"Gathering up of all things into Christ" (Eph 1:10) points to a third quality of our hope. It regards the present joy as only a foretaste of the fullness to come, when God shall inaugurate a new heaven (Rev 21: 5; cf. 2 Pet 3:13). We live in time expressed classically as tension between already and the not yet. The promised age has entered history (Acts 2:17), but it is not presently experienced in its fullness (1 Cor 13: 12). Meanwhile we know that our birthright is secured in Christ who is the first fruits of a liberated and transformed humanity (1 Cor 15:20), and the first born within the large human family (Rom 8:29). And all the rest of creation stars and trees, other plants, rocks, animals,

fish and the oceans in which they dwell are marked equally for redemption and transformation (Rom 8:18- 25; cf. 2 Cor 3:18). We reach out to take this promise: and the organ with which we gasp our birthright is hope (Rom 8: 24-25). Hope then is the power in and through which we rejoice. It is a hope at once radical and inclusive, bearing within itself all the present contradictions of life in the firm conviction that God will bring to pass all that has been promised.

#### *d) The Source of Hope Lies Outside of Us*

The issue of death is especially significant to humanity in the context of hope. It is in the face of death that "the riddle of human existence grows most acute," the Second Vatican Council stated (*Gaudium et Spes* 18). Yet it is one of the great curiosities of human existence in our day that man avoids discussing death seriously. Even funerals are stripped of references to death, and it is common to hear that a loved one "will live forever in our memories," as if those memories will not eventually pass away, too.

If death cannot be conquered, there is no hope. If there is no hope in a future beyond this world, there is no meaningful life in this world. But if there is meaning, there must be eternity, and if there is eternity, there is vision of life. However, a vision of life that ignores human mortality cannot be a source of authentic hope. If there is hope, there is a source of hope: the risen and glorified God-Man who has conquered death by death. The hope he gives "does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5).

### **6. Tribulation (*thlipsis*) and Hope**

In the second sequence Rom 12:12 (12b) Paul clearly fosters a positive attitude towards affliction and councils the Roman believers to prepare themselves to be steadfast in affliction rather than escape from it. The sequence again echoes 1 Cor 13:7. The verb *hupomenō* occurs regularly in earliest Christian literature in the sense "endure," "hold out," "stand one's ground" in trouble, affliction, persecution (cf. Mk 13:13; 1 Cor 13:7; 2 Tim 2:10; Heb 10:32; 12: 2; Jas 1:12; 1 Pet 2: 20).<sup>7</sup> The degree to which Paul successfully integrates suffering

7 The translation "endure" should not be given a too passive connotation as its correlate *hupomene* implies a positive attitude to suffering.

into his understanding of the process of salvation is one of the strong features of his soteriology.<sup>8</sup>

Paul's reference to the word *thlipsis* can simply mean distress brought about by outward circumstances (cf. Rom 5:3; 2 Cor 1:4,8; 2:4; 6:4; 7:4; 8:2,13; Phil 1:17; 4:14; 1 Thess 1:6; 3:3,7; 2Thess 1:4). The trials and afflictions which Paul experienced were many and varied, and this is reflected in the catalogs found in his letters (Rom 8:35; 1 Cor 4:9-13; 2 Cor 4:8-9; 6:4-5; 11:23-29; 12:10). In 2 Corinthians 11:23-29 Paul's trials and afflictions are listed in great detail.<sup>9</sup> The attitude reflected in the writings of the Hellenistic moralists<sup>10</sup> and in some Jewish writings of the period<sup>11</sup> is that hardship functions as a test of character.

8 J.D.G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, WBC, Texas, Word Books, 1988, 743.

9 The passage falls into four parts, each reflecting a different aspect of these afflictions:

i. imprisonments, beatings and being near death, including five occasions when he received the thirty-nine lashes (i.e., the maximum allowed minus one) at the hands of the Jews, three times when he was beaten with rods by Gentiles, one stoning and three shipwrecks (vv. 23b-25).

ii. frequent journeys, with their accompanying dangers of rivers, bandits and Jews as well as Gentile; dangers in the city, in the wilderness and at the sea; and dangers from false Christians (v. 26).

iii. toil and hardship, including sleepless nights (whether as privations or vigils), hunger, thirst, cold and nakedness (v. 27).

iv. anxiety for all the churches (vv. 28-29)

10 E.g., Epictetus, *Dissertations* 3,12.10; 4.8.31; Seneca, *Epistulae Moralia*, 13.1-3; Lists of afflictions were used by the Hellenistic moralists to depict serenity in the midst of suffering and to provide a model of endurance for their readers. They believed that sufferings played a part in the divine plan. In these respects they parallel Paul's attitude to hardships and his use of lists of afflictions. However, Paul differed radically from those who minimized the impact of afflictions and saw in their triumph over them a demonstration of their own power. Paul frankly admitted the distress caused by his afflictions (2 Cor 1:8-9), and gloried in the fact that it was God's power, not his own, which enabled him to endure (Cor 12:9-10. cf. G.F. Hawthorne (ed.), *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*, Illinois, Inter-Varsity Press, 1993, 18-19.

11 E.g., Wis 3:5-6; Sir 2:1-5; Jdt 8:25-26; Pss of Solomon 16:14-15; Testament of Joseph. 2:7; 4Macc 17:11-16



*Thlipsis* can also be used of the tribulations of the last days (as in Dan 12:1; Mk 13:19, 24 and parr.). Yet the eschatological tension of the already and not yet is also prominent in the text. Though the reality around us is disheartening, the hope conceived in the light of God's faithfulness in the past and present propels us to move forward and face the future with more confidence. Hope thus is an encouragement to believers in the midst of tribulation. At the same time it also prevents believers from being content with present circumstances. Hope insists that believers wait with eager longing for the great day when all of God's promises are fulfilled. For this reason Paul not only compares the believer's present tribulation and the groaning of the sub-human world with birth pang but reflects on Christian hope as an attribute shared by both human beings and the whole of creation (Rom 8:22).<sup>12</sup>

## 7. Hope in a Culture of Death

In recent decades, theories about politics and society have frequently been based on the belief that freedom, human dignity, and justice are shifting cultural values or man-made ideas created to meet particular needs at various points in history. This is the essence of trendy theories that undermine belief in an objective, transcendent moral order. Their materialist assumptions lead to the belief that man's "hope" and "meaning" is found in material things - ranging from political movements to fine wine to video games - and that progress is inevitable because of advances in science and technology. Man's hope for anything beyond himself is diverted into dead ends, including the literal ones produced by abortion, euthanasia, and other "solutions" to man's material problems.

In a culture of death, the tension that man experiences as one who is "on the way" must be dulled or destroyed. As Peter Kreeft shows in *Heaven: The Heart's Deepest Longing*,<sup>13</sup> the questions "In what may I hope?" and "What may I hope for?" A simple day today life example will help us to answer this question.

12 Enduring suffering with courage and confidence is an essential theme in stoic teaching which Seneca (c. 4 BCE-65 CE), the stoic philosopher and contemporary of Paul was trying to impart to his audience.

13 P. Kreeft *Heaven: The Heart's Deepest Longing*, Ft. Collins, Ignatius Press, 2004.

A farmer plants his grain in hope. He puts the seed into the ground, and he anticipates a harvest. Because he knows that there are forces at work, to which he has added his own toil, he knows there will be a harvest: There is life in the seed; there is power in the sunshine; there is fruitfulness in the soil; there is release in the rain. These forces combine the very things that are needed, and are now at work, that will produce the very harvest that he is looking for. That is hope. Hope isn't just a blind, vague, misty desire for something to come in the future — that is never real hope, that is blind hope and it is utterly worthless. True hope is something that is based upon present circumstances, and this is what we have in the Christian. He is going through tribulation and trial, and it isn't pleasant, but there is something about it that he sees that is producing and working toward a culmination which will be delightful beyond measure. This is why he rejoices in his tribulation. This illustration is sufficient enough to reflect on the forward looking character of hope.

#### ***a) Hope: Hermeneutical Basis of Eschatology***

One of the positive values of apocalyptic beliefs is its optimistic outlook in a pessimistic context where life is threatened by the forces of evil in multiple forms. In such a situation the message the apocalyptic conveys is one of consolation and hope. The apocalyptic world view instills the hope that God, the Lord and master of history, will not abandon us in our sufferings and hardships but will bring us close to him through them. Even death is not something insurmountable. There is resurrection.<sup>14</sup> Since the basis of Christian belief is mostly rooted in an apocalyptic world view, Christian faith is sustained by the theme of eschatological hope. Like the apocalypticists, Paul's unshakeable faith in the future enabled him to interpret the believers' present suffering as an eschatological prelude to the future glory. Hence he begins to understand and interpret the existential apostolic hardships and the opposition he encountered during his ministry in consideration of the hope that assured him of the future glory which ranks far superior in comparison with the afflictions that he had gone through in his earthly life.

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14 G. B. Caird, *New Testament Theology*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1994, 238.

### ***b) Hope, an Eschatological Key to the Unknown Future***

Since hope has to do with the unseen and the future (Rom 8:24-25) it provides the crucial epistemological key to envisage the future with great anticipation. By stressing on hope in Rom 5:24-25 Paul makes his epistemological stance clear with regard to the future. In another context when the burden of the apostolic ministry outweighed his mortality, he hastened to add that a Christians lives in hope, walks by faith rather than by sight (2 Cor 5:7). The distinction between the seen and the unseen, visible and the invisible is characteristic of Greek philosophy. Plato who contrasted the transitory nature of the visible world with the in transitory nature of the invisible world delineated that the knowledge of the invisible world is possible only through rational insight. Paul who was conversant with this platonic thought (cf. Rom 1: 20 all that is visible is transitory) seems to indicate that his epistemology of the future is rooted in his intuitive experiences. While in Platonic thought the knowledge of the real world is possible through rational insight, in Paul's view, it is available to believers through the medium of hope. This will fit into the epistemological scheme of Indian Philosophy which considers intuition as superior source of knowledge. Christian hope is then quantitatively distinct from general human hoping.<sup>15</sup>

### ***c) Hope, a Pragmatic Key***

In a world of suffering and unpredictable adversities, it is natural for a human being, to develop pessimisms about their present life and destiny. Pessimism about the present leads effectively to disengagement from the present. But when life's options are looked through the spectacle of Christian hope, there occurs a complete turn around of one's perception of present existence. The value of the future so outweighs the value of the present that only the future is considered worthy of effort or concentration.<sup>16</sup> The perspective of hope focused on the futuristic blessings sustains the believing community to face the challenges of this temporal world. The God of the future, revealed in Christ is ever calling us to responsible action in

15 P.S. Minear, *Christian Hope and the Second Coming*, Philadelphia, Westminster, 1954, 13.

16 K. Löning, "Reincarnation or Resurrection?: Resurrection and Biblical Apocalyptic", *Concilium* 5 (1993) 67-74, 74.



the present age. We are called to be actors in a drama which has as its aim the redemption and the establishment of an eternal kingdom. History has its meaning because it is teleologically oriented.<sup>17</sup> It was their hope of the future that enabled the Hebrews to face the reality of their existence which was full of challenges and continuing oppositions. Speaking of the prophetic eschatology Altizer indicates that despite the delay of the end, prophet after prophet continued to be caught up in this unreal hope. It was this expectation which made life bearable in the terrifying days of the destruction of the nation and during the exile, for it was the imminence of the End which gave power and urgency to the moral religious obedience of the believer.<sup>18</sup> Like the prophets of the yesteryears the eschatological hope enabled Paul to face the challenges. The hope in the future enabled Paul not to be perturbed by the oppositions and hardships but rather provided him the much needed animation to engage himself in facing the challenges of the present existence dominated by the forces of evil and to actively work for the transformation of the believers and the world at large. Consequently Paul desisted from indulging in time setting for what God is going to do at some point in the future, though this was the general trend in his time. Rather he focused on discharging one's responsibilities in a given situation and personal preparedness. This perception influenced him not to tread the path of the apocalypticists who were undermining the significance of present history in view of their deterministic worldview. Accordingly the Christ event has helped Paul to avoid one of the negative tendencies of the apocalypticists that strove to minimize the significance of the present history.<sup>19</sup>

## 7. Obstacles to Hope

The two biggest distortions of hope are despair and presumption. As dissimilar as they appear, they are both forms of hopelessness and, therefore, sins against hope. Both are based on faulty views of

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17 C. M. Home, "Eschatology – the Controlling Thematic in Theology," 57-58.

18 T.J. Altizer, *Oriental Mysticism AND Biblical Eschatology*, Philadelphia, Westminster, 1961.

19 A.T. Lincoln, *Paradise Now and Not Yet: Studies in the Role of Heavenly Dimension in Paul's Thought with Special Reference to His Eschatology*, SNTSMS 43, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981, 179.

God and man. Those who despair give up hope in salvation from God “for help in attaining it or for the forgiveness of his sins” (CCC 2091). It is common to associate despair with depression and, in many cases, to discount the culpability of the one who despairs. Yet there is a despair that is not simply a mood or an emotion but a decision of the will. It is, ultimately, a rejection of Christ and his gift of redemption. The root of despair is *acedia*, or spiritual sloth, which refuses the joy offered by God and is actually sickened by God’s goodness. Presumption is a form of hopelessness because the one who presumes has come to believe that he/she is no longer “on the way” to a future fulfillment - which comes, by God’s grace, only after death - but that he has already attained the goal of eternal life in this life. The *Catechism* explains the two forms of presumption:

Either man presumes upon his own capacities (hoping to be able to save himself without help from on high), or he presumes upon God’s almighty power or his mercy (hoping to obtain his forgiveness without conversion and glory without merit).<sup>20</sup>

The first type of presumption is a form of Pelagianism, the heretical belief that man has the ability to save himself. It is closely related to pseudo-religions (such as liberation theology) that attempt to create the kingdom of heaven by political means. The other form of presumption is found in the beliefs of Fundamentalists and Evangelicals, whose brand of “eternal security” promises that once they have made a profession of faith (i.e., “asked Jesus to come into their hearts”), they are saved. Period. This presumption reveals a failure to understand the true pilgrim character of Christian existence and demonstrates a “lack of humility, a denial of one’s actual creatureliness and an unnatural claim to be like God. Fundamentalists who believe that Catholics “don’t know if they’re saved or not” are convinced, in the words of James G. McCarthy, former Catholic and author of *The Gospel According to Rome*,<sup>21</sup> “that Biblical salvation is secure, for it does not depend upon man but upon God.” This thinking fails to distinguish between the promises of God, which are always true and steadfast, and the choices of man, which are not. The object of hope

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20 CCC 2092.

21 J. G. McCarthy, *The Gospel According to Rome*, New York, Harvest House, 1995.

– salvation - remains secure, but the subject of hope – man - can accept, reject, despair, and presume at any time. We don't possess free will only when we make our initial choice of God's gift of salvation; the capacity to later reject, deny, or trample it is always with us.

The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we shall also live with him; if we endure, we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful - for he cannot deny himself. (2 Tim. 2:11-13)

This is not the language of presumption or eternal security but of authentic hope and free will. We are warned that denying God will result in God denying us - because he respects the gift of free will he has given man. God is faithful. But we can be unfaithful. To think otherwise is presumptuous.

## Conclusion

In the virtue of hope more than any other, man understands and affirms that he is a creature, that he has been created by God.<sup>22</sup> Hope, the desire for fulfillment beyond what is found in time and history as opposed to the hope we have for good health or a long life makes no sense unless there is a personal and loving God.

Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae* asserts that "man's happiness is twofold." The first happiness belongs to human nature and can be obtained by man's natural efforts. The other, he writes, "is a happiness surpassing man's nature and man can obtain by the power of God alone, by a kind of participation of the Godhead, about which it is written that by Christ we are made 'partakers of the divine nature' (2 Pet 1:4)."<sup>23</sup> Because this supernatural happiness surpasses what man is naturally capable of, he is reliant on God to provide the ability to achieve it.

Understanding the nature of hope means accepting that Christians live in a state of tension and yearning but that our natural instinct is to flee from tension and fulfill the yearning with false hopes and dangerous distractions. We are meant for communion with God, but we are pilgrims this side of heaven. We are meant to rest in heaven,

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22 J. Pieper *Faith Hope Love*, Ft. Collins, Ignatius Press, 1997.

23 ST I-II.62.1.



but we toil on earth; we are spiritual and material. We are sinners who, by God's grace, are being saved. Everyday in ways big and small this tension affects our lives.

This is the "eschatological tension" that John Paul II referred to in his encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. It is the desire to rest in God; it is the tension that is "kindled by the Eucharist" because the "Eucharist is truly a glimpse of heaven appearing on earth."<sup>24</sup> Those who partake of the Eucharist and who share in the life of the risen Christ have tasted the marriage supper of the Lamb, but they are still on their way to the New Jerusalem. The late Holy Father overtly connected the Eucharist with the theological virtue of hope:

A significant consequence of the eschatological tension inherent in the Eucharist is also the fact that it spurs us on our journey through history and plants a seed of living hope in our daily commitment to the work before us. Certainly the Christian vision leads to the expectation of "new heavens" and "a new earth" (Rev. 21:1), but this increases, rather than lessens, our sense of responsibility for the world today.<sup>25</sup>

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24 John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Mumbai, St. Paul's, 2003, # 19.

25 *Ibid.*, # 20.

# **Paul and Women Revisited**

**Raj Irudaya**

In this article, the author asks the question how Paul has come to be so badly misunderstood. How could he who proposed a radical vision of humanity based on the teaching that all humans are equal before and in God (Gal 3:28), present women as inferior to men? How do we try to understand and interpret his enigmatic writings concerning women? Do these represent a consistent Pauline view? The author says that a hermeneutical reading of Paul is helpful to understand and to unravel the depths of meaning implied by him in his writings on women. It is in the context of the Pauline vision of radical humanity that his teachings and writings on women have to be re-read. In this re-reading we need to be aware of the different factors, i.e., his socio-cultural milieu, the fact that some of the writings are deutero-Pauline, the interpolations at the hand of the redactors of his letters, etc. The last part of the article presents a re-reading of Eph 5:21-33. The author ends on the note that we need to reinterpret Paul for today.

St. Paul has been a daring missionary and a fascinating apostle. His life, mission, teachings and writings have greatly contributed to the growth of the early Church and they continue to offer the same to the Church today. Though he was not one of the twelve apostles living with Jesus during his public ministry, yet the way Paul was possessed by the mind, heart and spirit of Jesus is amazing. The life and mission of Paul recorded in the Acts of the Apostles and his teachings enshrined in the fourteen epistles are the available sources to get to know him as the apostle of Christ and missionary of the early Church.

Some of the writings of Paul as regards women have been perplexing, enigmatic and even contradictory. To cite a few examples:

... Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ... a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man. Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man (1 Cor 11:3, 7- 10).

Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Saviour. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be subject in everything to their husbands (Eph 5:22-24).

Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor (1 Tim 2:11-14).

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:27-28).

... woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God (1Cor 11:11-12).

The afore-quoted teachings of Paul have been interpreted as both enslaving and liberative. Down the centuries the enslaving writings have been used to perpetuate the inferiority and inequality of women while the liberative teachings have been deployed to uphold the dignity and equality of women both in the Church and society. The unfavourable teachings found in the letters of Paul have made some portray him as a misogynist. The crucial questions continue: How is it that Paul who held every person one in Christ Jesus could present women as inferior to men? Are they the true words of Paul? Have the redactors added these teachings to the Pauline Corpus? Do these words reflect the socio-cultural milieu of his churches? In this modest attempt we will try to understand and interpret the enigmatic writings



against the backdrop of the overall vision and mission of Paul found in the Acts of the Apostles and in his letters.

### 1. Ways of Understanding Paul

Several attempts have been made to understand the perplexing and contradictory teachings found in the letters of Paul as regards women. The churches founded by Paul included both Greek converts and Hellenized Jews who had the preponderant influence and impact of Greek Philosophy. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and the later Greek philosophers who had championed the Greek philosophical tradition advocated and upheld the attitudes, views and teachings that women are inferior and unequal to men. Stoic philosophers added to the disdain and contempt on women in Greek societies.<sup>1</sup> The Hellenized Jews also had imbibed the Greek philosophical spirit of looking down on and treating women as inferior to men. "Unfortunately, the Gentiles whom Paul sought to convert to a faith in Jesus Christ brought with them the Greek notions of female inferiority, espoused the same interpretations of the Old Testament as those of the Hellenized Jews, and used Paul's writings to give authority to the same philosophical viewpoint that Paul opposed".<sup>2</sup> It is observed that the Greek converts and the Hellenized Jews could have let their Greek philosophical notions of female inferiority influence the thought of Paul so that he maintained the *status quo* of their society. Thus those who first interpreted Pauline writings were the followers of age-old Greek philosophy and they understood Paul from the perspectives of their own culture and traditions. "... in a sense, they read Paul's words through the eyes of Aristotle. And in so doing, they established a traditional method of viewing Paul's insights from a perspective that was Greek rather than Jewish and pagan rather than Christian."<sup>3</sup> The attempts to interpret Scripture from the perspectives of Greek philosophy reached its high expression in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century in the writing of Thomas Aquinas.

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- 1 Plato, *Timaeus* (trans. H.D.P. Lee), Baltimore, Penguin, 1965, 42-C, 90C, 91A; Plato, *The Republic* (trans. W.H.D. Rouse), New York, Mentor, 1956, 454B, 456A, 457A-D; Aristotle, *Politics* (ed. R. McKean), New York, Random House, 1941, 1.1259B, 1254A, 1260A.
  - 2 J.T. Bristow, *What Paul Really Said about Women*, San Francisco, Harper Collins, 1991, 27-28.
  - 3 *Ibid.*, 3.

“Aquinas interpreted the writings of Saint Paul through the mind of Aristotle, and the Greek deprecation of women became solidly infused within Christian Theology.<sup>4</sup>

Another way of understanding Paul’s enigmatic teachings on women proposes that he as a product of his own culture and society could have also been influenced by the socio-cultural milieu of his own times.<sup>5</sup> Such adverse perspectives on women would have found an entry in the writings of his early epistles. But as a graced and chosen human person Paul grew in wisdom and knowledge in his life and mission. With such an ongoing growth in his life and mission he would have discovered Christ’s enlightening ways more profoundly in order to transcend the inferior understanding on women. Hence the liberative and life-affirming perspectives on women would have accompanied his later preaching and writings. This is another way of explaining the presence of contradictory teachings on women found in his letters.

It is also widely believed that Paul is not the direct author of all the fourteen epistles or of all that is written in them. It is proposed that the friends and co-workers of Paul who had accompanied or encountered him in his ministry and had understood his teachings would have attempted to produce Pauline thoughts in their own words. Such writings which are called deuterio-Pauline could have been incorporated into the epistles of Paul. These occurrences of deuterio-Pauline letters or passages are yet another help to understand why the enigmatic viewpoints on women have been expressed in Paul’s letters.

The final presentation of the fourteen epistles as given to us is not entirely the work of Paul. There were some who compiled, edited and redacted the Pauline writings. These redactors could have also added their own thoughts and viewpoints in the name of Paul. Thus the contribution at the hands of a redactor could have been also another reason why Paul’s teachings on women are contradictory.

The hermeneutical reading of Paul is helpful to understand and to unravel the depths of meaning implied by him in his writings on women.

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4 *Ibid.*, 29.

5 R.D. Witherup, *101 Questions and Answers on Paul*, New York, Paulist Press, 2003, 174-175.

An exegetical study of some of the Pauline writings on women would reveal that Paul had avoided those words and phrases in Greek which would connote meanings which unfortunately our English translations imply. He had been selective in the use of the right words in Greek in his writings on women and had challenged the social roles for women in his age and the philosophy and theology that defined those roles.

## 2. Paul's Radical Concern for Women

Paul has proposed a radical vision of humanity based on the teaching that all humans are equal before and in God: "...for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:26-28). In the context of their culture these Greek converts and Hellenized Jews, who displayed a pre-dominance of male-centeredness and considered women inferior in their society, Paul infuses the foundational Christian vision of humanity based on equality irrespective of the differences in race, status and gender.

As a person well-versed in Hebrew Scriptures Paul's radical vision of humanity as enunciated in Gal 3:26-28 has sprung from the original vision of God on humanity found in Gen 1:27: "...God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."<sup>6</sup> Man and woman constitute humanity. Humanity is the image and likeness of God and hence both man and woman are in the image and likeness of God. This unequivocal vision of humanity is emphatically reiterated by Paul in a cultural milieu where women were not considered and treated as equal to men. Faith in God, through Christ, who created man and woman in his own

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6 The spirit of Gen 1:27 definitely echoes in Gal 3:26-27. The first two pairs Jew or Greek, slave or free are connected by a correlative conjunction, i.e., "or" while the third pair "male and female" is connected by a coordinating conjunction, i.e., "and." The pair 'male and female' is a reflection of "male and female he created them." The racial and status differences expressed in the pairs "Jew or Greek," "slave or free" are evolved and made by humans and so they are divisive and discriminatory. But the male and female gender is given by God to constitute one humanity based on the image and likeness of God.



image will reassert and revitalize the radical human family based on equality and dignity. This is reinforced by Paul who upheld that all things have their origin in and from God. "Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God (1 Cor 11:11-12). Through the foundational and radical vision of humanity Paul has espoused and defended emphatically the equality and dignity of women in his society.

It is in the context of the Pauline vision of radical humanity that his teachings and writings on women have to be re-read. In this re-reading we need to be aware of the different factors, i.e., his socio-cultural milieu, the fact that some of the writings are deutero-Pauline, the interpolations at the hand of the redactors of his letters, etc. It is not within the scope of this short article to study and reinterpret all the enigmatic and contradictory teachings of Paul which are traditionally presented as unfavourable and enslaving to women. To have a sample of re-reading of Pauline writings, we will make a study of Eph 5:21-33.

### **3. Re-reading Ephesians 5:21-33**

In this pericope Paul presents how the Christian household ought to be. He offers a new and radical model of marriage which is compared to Christ's relationship with the Church. He advocates that a Christian family be modelled after Christ who is the head of the Church, his bride. In this connection he tells us how a wife and a husband should be related to each other in love. He invites the wives to be subject to their husbands as they are to the Lord because the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Saviour. The wife is asked to be subject to the husband as the church is subject to Christ. He demands that husbands love their wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her (vv. 22-25). Very often Eph 5:21-33 has been used by those who defend the idea of superiority of men over women. Would Paul have intended male superiority and female inferiority in his radical model of marriage which is likened to Christ's relationship with the Church? Will it not be a contradiction in terms? To understand really the Pauline mind in this pericope we shall make a study of two key words used here, namely "head," and "be subject."

Right at the outset of the study of these two key words it has to be noted that this pericope is specifically addressed to wives and husbands in the context of Christian marriage and family and not to men and women in general. Therefore it is not proper to use this Pauline address to assert men's superiority or to perpetuate women's inferiority (if at all it exists intrinsically) in society.

#### *a) Pauline Understanding of "Head"*

Paul presents the husband as the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church (v. 23). The term "head" is interpreted as the boss or the ruler and used by some to defend male superiority over women. Studying the Greek term used for "head" will enable us to gauge the Pauline meaning of "head." The term "head" in English literally means the physical head of one's body. Figuratively it also refers to the leader of a group or of people. In Greek two terms are used to denote head. One is *archē* and the other is *kephalē*. Three meanings are attached to *archē*. One meaning is "head" in terms of leadership and it refers to a leader of a group or of people. *Archē* also denotes "beginning." For example *archē* is used with this sense by Mark and John at the start of the gospel: "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ ... (Mk 1:1); "In the beginning was the Word..." (Jn 1:1). The third meaning of *archē* is "first" in terms of importance and power. Different forms of *archē* are deployed in the Second Testament to mean the head or leader or ruler of a group/people.

In the pericope of our study Paul has avoided using the term *archē* to attribute the meaning of a leader or ruler to the husband as head. Hence *archē* cannot be interpreted here to give that meaning of head by which the husband rules over his wife. But quite significantly Paul has used here the term, *kephalē*. Though *kephalē* means "head" as a physical part of one's body and also "foremost" in terms of position, the meaning of "boss," "ruler," "leader" is not ascribed to it. Emphasizing that *kephalē* is a military term, J.T. Bristow highlights its meaning: "It means 'one who leads,' but not in the sense of 'director.' *Kephalē* did not denote 'general,' or 'captain,' or someone who orders the troops from a safe distance; quite the opposite, a *kephalē* was one who went before the troops, the leader in the sense

of being in the lead, the first one to battle.”<sup>7</sup> With this meaning *kephalē* is understood as one who has taken the risk to be in the forefront of one’s troops to fight and even to be ready to die for one’s country or people. In this sense Christ is called *kephalē* of the Church; one who is in the forefront to offer himself entirely and even ready to sacrifice his life. Likewise it is in giving himself entirely a husband becomes the head of his wife and not in ruling over her. Thus the Pauline meaning of head is total self-gift of the husband to his wife and not lording or bossing over her in authority. Paul wants the husband to be head in this sense and to contribute to the radical model of Christian marriage and family.

### **b) Pauline Use of “be subject to”**

The term “be subject to” normally means one being obedient to the other who is superior and it has been used three times in vv. 21-24. The members of the Church are invited to be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives are asked to be subject to their husbands as the Church is subject to Christ. Does “being subject to” imply subservience? As *kephalē* does not mean ruler or leader, “be subject to” here does not mean obedience and much less subservience. The Greek word used to denote “to obey” is *hupakouō*. Obedience that is implied by *hupakouō* is that of a child to its parent or that of a slave to one’s master. Another Greek word which means “subject to” and “obey” is *peitharcheō*. This word implies obedience of one to another who is in power and authority. Paul has neither used *hupakouō* nor *peitharcheō* in this passage of our study and so “being subject to” does not mean obedience or subservience.

Paul has instead preferred to use the word *hupotassō* to mean “be subject to.” *Hupotassō* in its active form means “to subject to” or “to subordinate.” But Paul has used it in its imperative, middle voice form,<sup>8</sup> *hupotassomai*, which means the voluntary way of being subject to. “Give allegiance to,” “tend to the needs of,” “be supportive

7 J.T. Bristow, *What Paul Really Said about Women*, 36-37.

8 English has its verbs in the active or passive voice. In the active voice the subject of the verb is seen acting. In the passive voice the subject of the verb is found being acted upon. Along with the active and passive voice Greek has a middle voice in which the subject of the verb is acting in a sense that impinges on the subject.



of,” “be responsive to,” are the various meanings attached to *hupotassomai*. By the deliberate use of the appropriate Greek word Paul brings out the meaning of one being caring, supportive and responsive to the needs of others. Through the use of the word *kephalē* Paul highlights the meaning of the total self-gift of the husband to his wife. He invites the wife to be caring, supportive and responsive to husband and this is implied by *hupotassomai*. These are the binding and cementing qualities of Christian marriage. Therefore, “be subject to,” is not to be interpreted of the wife as being subservient to her husband but as being caring, concerned and responsive to him. This is the quality Paul demands of all the members of the Church: “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ” (v.21). This is the generic exhortation which caps the whole pericope 5:21-33 and several interpreters have attempted to remove the patriarchal colouring of the Ephesian household code. The mutuality the author advocates between Jews and Gentiles (Eph 2:11-22) is similarly envisioned between women and men here.<sup>9</sup> The husband through his total self-gift and the wife through her responsive disposition are called upon to make an authentic Christian family.

#### 4. Women Collaborators in Pauline Mission

Paul did attempt to usher in a counter culture of equality and dignity of women in his society which had ascribed an inferior status to women and meted out various discriminatory treatments. Some of the teachings of Paul bear witness to this attempt. In his life and mission Paul acted in ways that reinstated the equal and dignified status of women.

Several times in his epistles Paul rightly boasts himself of being an apostle called and sent by Christ (Rom 1:1; 11:13; 1 Cor 1:1, 9:1-2, 15:9; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1, etc). In his zealous apostolic mission of preaching and spreading the good news of the Crucified and Risen Christ in different places and countries Paul has respected the role and function of women in the mission and ministries of the Kingdom of God. In a society in which the role of woman was merely relegated to household duties and oblivious private space, Paul acknowledged and involved women in his apostolic ministries and

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9 E. Johnson, “Ephesians,” in C.A. Newsom and S.H. Ringe (eds.), *The Women's Bible Commentary*, London, SPCK, 1992, 341.

appreciated and encouraged their active participation in building up of Christian communities.

Paul ministered unto women and brought to them the good news of the Lord Jesus. In Philippi, a leading city of the district of Macedonia Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth listened to Paul and was baptized and along with Lydia her household too was baptized (Acts 16:11-15). In a society in which education was denied to women, Paul taught women and had them in the crowds to which he preached (Acts 17:4, 11-12). The importance and worth of women leaders within the churches was underscored by him. In Phil 4:2-3 he makes the mention of two women Euodia and Syntyche whom he compliments as those who struggled beside him in the work of the gospel. The very fact Paul mentioned their names explicitly reveal that they were both important persons in the church at Philippi. Paul respected and called women as his co-workers. He also highly commended their collaboration with him: "Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles" (Rom 16:3-4). In his greeting to this Jewish couple in Corinth Paul has placed the name of Prisca before the name of her husband Aquila. This is indicative of Paul's importance to Prisca, his co-worker. Aquila and Priscilla (Prisca) are recorded as those who evangelized Apollos, an eloquent native of Alexandria (Acts 18:24-28).

In Rom 16 we find Paul mentioning the names of twenty-six persons out of whom eight are significantly women. Phoebe is referred to as a deacon of the church at Cenchreae.<sup>10</sup>

Chrysostom wrote that Prisca was a teacher of Apollos, pastor of the church in Corinth after Paul had left. She had been a benefactor of many and of Paul himself as well (16:1-2). Paul respected the ministry of Junia so much that he mentioned her as one prominent among the apostles (16:7). The mention of women, their qualities and activities shows that Paul recognized and accepted their collaboration in his missionary journeys and ministries. Paul respected them as his collaborators and co-workers. In a society in which the role of women in public affairs was highly discouraged and even

10 Cf. Chrysostom, *Nicene ad Post-Nicene Fathers* (trans.), Grand Rapids, W.B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1956, 11.554, 13.515.

prohibited Paul's ways of proceeding with women in his mission were indeed path-breaking in the history of the early Church.

### 5. Interpreting Paul for Today

Paul's teachings and writings as well as his inspiring life and mission did influence immeasurably the growth of the early Church. Needless to say Paul continues to inspire and guide the Church even today. Paul as an apostle and missionary par excellence has been a trend-setter in many ways, namely in taking the good news to the non-Jews across the borders of Palestine, in building up the ecclesial communities far and wide, in his appropriate response to the issues and difficulties of his own times, in thinking and acting beyond his times and definitely in his approaches and attitudes towards women of his times. But unfortunately various traditional attitudes and cultural influences have misrepresented him. Highlighting this misrepresentation of Paul, R.D. Witherup writes: "... many people have often misunderstood Paul. I think he has been blamed wrongly for intolerant attitudes, especially with regard to some of his ethical teachings. Some of this confusion is due to taking his writings out of context. We forget that his letters were 'occasional' that is, composed with specific occasions and audiences in mind."<sup>11</sup> As 2008 has been announced as the Pauline Year by Pope Benedict XVI, it is our duty to understand and interpret Paul rightly and meaningfully. Paul's liberative and life-affirming attitudes and teachings as regards women have to be researched and highlighted more in the days to come so that they continue to guide the Church fruitfully in the Third Millennium.

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11 R.D. Witherup, *101 Questions and Answers on Paul*, 4.



# The Pauline Privilege in the Context of 1Cor 7

Assisi Saldanha

In this article the author addresses the first of the Corinthian concerns, namely the question of marriage. He examines first the nature of Paul's argument in the general context of 1Cor 7 and then, the issue of mixed marriage in vv. 12-16. Paul clearly highlights the Lord's command concerning unity and indissolubility of marriage and distinguishes it from his own opinion whenever he presents one, in the light of which he provides the rationale behind the *status quo* he wants maintained and the exception he is willing to grant. The key to understanding his emphasis on *status quo* is his eschatology. However, he is not advising a cessation of interaction with the world rather he is more urgent about the *quality* of that interaction – one interacts knowing what is of lasting importance in the eternal scheme of things. The author next examines the concerns of individual passages in 1Cor 7 so as to bring the issue of mixed marriages to clearer focus. Paul is shown to permit divorce in mixed marriages when the unbelieving partner in the marriage takes the first step to separate from the union. Whether Paul forbids remarriage as he explicitly did for the separated wife in v. 11 remains a matter of debate.

## Introduction

Beginning with 1Cor 7:1, Paul is addressing the Corinthian concerns which they probably raised in a letter they wrote to him shortly before he wrote 1Corinthians. That Paul has taken up issues which they have raised is evident from the way he begins this part of the letter with *peri de*. Such an opening is evident also in 1Cor 7:25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1. The first of the Corinthian concerns is problems concerning

marriage, which Paul addresses from 1Cor 7:1 onwards. We may identify a wide range of issues Paul deals with concerning the question of marriage - some raised by the Corinthians, others interjected by Paul himself in the course of his argument. We shall examine both the nature of Paul's argument in the general context of 1Cor 7 and how he addresses the issue of mixed marriage in particular.

### 1. The Nature and Context of Paul's Argument in 1Cor 7

What is remarkable is that with every issue introduced, Paul in some measure draws attention to three factors that bring out in full relief the topic under discussion.

#### *a) Factors that Constitute Paul's Argument*

First, he distinguishes between the Lord's command and his own opinion (1Cor 7:6, 8, 10, 12, 17, 25, 40). Second, he asks that the *status quo* be maintained (1Cor 7:3, 8, 10, 12-13, 17-18, 20, 24, 26-27, 37-38, 40). Third, he alerts them to a possible exception (1Cor 7:5-6, 9, 11, 15-16, 21b, 28, 36, 39b).<sup>1</sup> However, it is important to note how one finds Paul relating these three aspects to each other. It would appear that Paul is aware of the command of the Lord concerning the unity and indissolubility of marriage. He begins from there. The command remains uncontested throughout. When a new opinion must be given because of cultural exigencies arising out of urban Corinthian life he is careful in stating that it comes from himself or that it may be taken as an exception. We may now look into how the three aspects are related to each other. How do we perceive that relation?

#### *i. Relation between the Lord's command/Paul's opinion and status quo*

Paul asks *status quo* to be maintained in view of one or more reasons: that change would in some way violate the Lord's command (1Cor 7:3, 10, 12-13) or that God himself has called one to a particular

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1 R.A. Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, ANTC, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1998, 102 discerns the same general pattern of argumentation through most of Paul's argument in chapter 7. He finds that Paul first enunciates a general rule (vv. 2-3, 8, 10, 12-13, 26-27) and then makes exceptions (set off by 'but') for particular contingencies (vv. 5, 9, 11a, 15, 28), occasionally offering reasons for the rule or the exception.

state (Jew or Greek, slave or free) in life (1Cor 7: 17-18, 20, 24) or that the Lord's coming is imminent (1Cor 7: 8, 26-27, 37-38, 40). When he relates his choice in favour of *status quo* with the Lord's command, the former has to do with both the maintenance of the marriage and the rights and obligations arising out of it in view of the sacredness of marriage; however, when Paul asks that the *status quo* be preserved in conjunction with his own opinion, he has in mind either the fact that in Christ the Jew-Greek or slave-free divide does not hold anymore (1Cor 12:13; Gal 3:28) or that in view of the imminent coming of the Lord, the holding on to the *status quo* would give one the opportunity of staying prepared for that coming.

ii. *Relation between Lord's command/Paul's opinion and exception(s)*

The Lord's command on the unity and indissolubility of marriage is presumed unquestioned throughout there being no exception as we have in Mt 19:9. However, when Paul must venture into a situation not foreseen before, such as mixed marriages, he states his own opinion which also moves in the direction of the Lord's command, that is, the maintenance of marriage. Nevertheless, it would appear that he is aware that at times his opinion may meet a hurdle, in which case he leaves a way out. Quite apart from a notable exception we find in 1Cor 7:12-16, which we shall examine in the second part of this article, there are also other exceptions each of which emerges in the context of the statement of his own opinion. The exception may be derived in the sense that it in some way keeps intact the Lord's command (1Cor 7:11, 39b), or that in the absence of a clear mandate from our Lord, Paul is able to use the exception to secure continence in view to ensuring either a proper appreciation of marriage (1Cor 7:5-6) or a better preparedness for the Lord's coming (1Cor 7:9, 28, 36). He uses the exception in one other way, that is, allowing a slave to become free if he should have the opportunity (1Cor 7:21b).

iii. *Relation between status quo and Pauline exception(s)*

Whether the *status quo* is to be maintained in view of the Lord's command or Paul's own opinion, we find that in every case there appears a corresponding exception. For example, keep *status quo* by maintaining sexual relations in marriage (1Cor 7:3), the exception being 1Cor 7:5-6. The unmarried, widowers and widows maintain

*status quo* by staying unmarried (1Cor 7:8), the exception being 1Cor 7: 9. Christian married couples stay married (1Cor 7:10), the exception being 1Cor 7:11. Christians married to unbelievers stay in marriage (1Cor 7:12-13), the exception being 1Cor 7:15-16. Remain in the state you were called (1Cor 7: 17-18, 20, 24), the exception being 1Cor 7:21b. The unmarried or engaged couples remain as you are (1Cor 7:26-27), the exception being 1Cor 7: 28, 36. Widows remain unmarried (1Cor 7: 40), the exception being 1Cor 7: 39b.

The reason for the exception proffered has much to do also with the kind of exception Paul is making. When he allows one to marry even though he would prefer one to maintain *status quo* by not marrying, he does so mostly on account of the difficulty one may have in dealing with one's concupiscence (1Cor 7: 9, 28, 36, 39b). Or again, another kind of exception we find in 1Cor 7: 5-6 must have to do with assuaging the ascetical views of the Corinthians regarding marriage. Or again, when he addresses the command of the Lord concerning the unity and indissolubility of marriage, the only concession he is willing to allow is for the wife to separate from her husband; however, he makes clear that in such a case she must remain single or be reconciled to her husband (1Cor 7:11). Another concession that Paul makes has to do with the breakup of a mixed marriage. We will need to examine the nature of this exception (1Cor 7: 15) later. And, finally, should God have called Jew/Greek, slave/free to become a Christian he need not try to overcome that which was peculiar to his original state as Jew/Greek or slave/free. The exception in this case concerns the slave should he have the opportunity to become free.

#### ***b) The Rationale behind the Status Quo and the Exception***

Two factors need to be taken into account. First, the importance Paul gives to the Lord's command and to his own opinion and next, to the rationale behind the *status quo* he wants maintained and the exception he is willing to grant.

##### *i. The centrality of the Lord's command/Paul's opinion in Paul's argument in 1 Cor 7*

The following schema will present the Lord's command/Paul's opinion directing a variety of situations encountered in 1 Cor 7. There is at the same time a *status quo* to be maintained and an exception to be made.



The Situation Encountered	<i>Status quo</i> to be Maintained	Lord's Command/ Paul's Opinion	The Exception and the Reason for the Exception
Concerning sexual relationship within marriage (1Cor 7:1-7)	Maintain sexual relations within marriage (vv. 2-3)	Paul's concession flowing from the Lord's command (v. 6)	But a temporary self-restraint may be exercised for the sake of prayer (to assuage their ascetical views) (v. 5)
Concerning the unmarried, i.e., the widowers, and widows (1Cor 7:8-9)	The unmarried, i.e., the widowers, and widows remain unmarried (v. 8)	Paul's injunction (v. 8)	But they should marry when self-restraint becomes difficult (v. 9)
Concerning marriage between Christians (1Cor 7:10-11)	No divorce in Christian marriage (v. 10)	Lord's command (v. 10)	But if the wife must separate, she is still obliged to remain unmarried or return to her husband (v. 11a)
Concerning mixed marriages (1Cor 7: 12-16)	Christians married to unbelievers must stay in marriage (vv. 12-13)	Paul's concession (v. 15ab)	But an unbelieving partner may be allowed to depart if this partner wishes to separate. There is some ambiguity whether the reason given (v. 15c) serves as a reason in favour of the <i>status quo</i> or the exception.
Concerning the disposition required of a Jew/Greek, slave/free on becoming a Christian (1Cor 7: 17-24)	Jew/Greek, slave/free when Christian must remain in the state they were called (vv. 17-18, 20, 24)	Paul's rule in all the churches (v. 17b)	But a slave may gain freedom if an opportunity presents itself (v. 21b)

Concerning the unmarried and the engaged (1Cor 7: 25-38)	The unmarried and the engaged remain as you (vv. 26-27)	Paul's opinion (v. 25)	But they may marry without the thought of having incurred sin should self-restraint become difficult (vv. 28-31, 36-38)
Concerning remarriage of widows (1Cor 7: 39-40)	Widows remain as you are (v. 40a)	Paul's judgment (v. 40)	But a widow may marry but only to a Christian. The reason perhaps is that self-restraint, as in the above, has become difficult (v. 39b)

ii. *A contrast between the rationale behind the status quo and the exception*

What becomes evident from the above is that the reason why Paul asks the *status quo* to be maintained is not always as varied as why he grants an exception. As we have seen earlier, the reason for the exception proffered has much to do also with the kind of exception Paul is making. But when Paul wants the Corinthians to continue with the *status quo*, in every type of situation encountered, he seems to have the imminent coming of the Lord as the reason for it (1Cor 7: 26a) or the fact that the form of this world is passing away (1Cor 7:31b). The latter would include marriage which is a this-worldly phenomenon. By inviting them to hold on to the *status quo* Paul is trying "to inculcate in the Corinthians a sense of what it means to live in the eschatological age."<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it would appear that the key to understanding his emphasis on why one is advised to maintain *status quo* is his eschatology. However, when he advises the Corinthians to preserve *status quo* or "remain as you are," he is not advising a cessation of interaction with the world. That is, what "Paul speaks about is not a matter of a *degree* of interaction with the world as if Paul were counseling a bit less interaction or a gradual tapering

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2 B. Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, Michigan, W.B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1995, 179.

off. It is, rather a matter of the *quality* of that interaction – one interacts knowing what is of lasting importance in the eternal scheme of things.”<sup>3</sup> This fact becomes especially evident when he exclaims, “I wish that all were as I myself am” (1Cor 7: 7a). Thus in every type of situation encountered in 1Cor 7, there is at the heart of it either the Lord’s command or Paul’s opinion directing it. And in either case there is equally a *status quo* to be maintained and an exception to be made. Of course, it would appear that Paul is far more passionate in upholding the *status quo* than in granting an exception, which he does only because it seems the most logical thing to do. However, this is not to be understood as proving some ascetic streak in Paul rather it is the outcome of his eschatology as we have observed above.<sup>4</sup>

### c) *Paul’s Argumentation in the Text of 1Cor 7*

We may now examine the concerns of individual passages in 1Cor 7 and highlight the relation between the aspects that constitute Paul’s argument in each case so as to bring the issues involved into clearer focus.

#### i. 1 Cor 7:1-7

The issue here is clear. Paul in v. 1b is quoting what the Corinthians, most probably some women, have been saying. Their view that a man should not touch a woman even within marriage appears to have an ascetical bias.<sup>5</sup> Paul’s injunction that husband and wife should not deny each other conjugal rights stems from the fact that mutual giving and receiving is an expression of love<sup>6</sup> that even the staying away from the exercise of conjugal rights must be done by mutual

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3 *Ibid.*, 180.

4 *Ibid.*, 179. According to V. Wimbush, whom Witherington, 178 quotes: “‘remain’ was not intended to support the *status quo*; it was designed only to relativize the importance of all worldly conditions and relationships. Yet more important, even the ‘remaining’ is relativized: those who are afforded the opportunity (for example, slaves, vs. 21) or those who experience the pressure of temptation (for example, engaged parties, vss. 36-38) can change their social condition or status without having their status with God affected.”)

5 R.A. Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 109-112.

6 A.C. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians. A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary*, Grand Rapids, W.B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 2006, 103.

agreement, for a season, for the sake of prayer. The wish that Paul expresses in v. 7a cannot be taken as the *status quo* he intends in this passage because he recognizes marriage as a gift just as much as he does celibacy (v. 7b). And the latter he admits is not given to everybody. If so, where lies the *status quo*? That the *status quo* of mutual sexual relations within marriage must be maintained (vv. 2-3) remains at the heart of this passage whereas staying away from it, it would appear, becomes a concession (v. 6) granted by Paul to assuage *their* ascetical beliefs, and not his, regarding sexual conduct within marriage. The maintenance of mutual sexual relations within marriage must come from the implied Lord's command, namely that the two shall become one following Genesis.

ii. 1Cor 7: 8-9

Paul speaks to the unmarried and widows. A. C. Thiselton<sup>7</sup> believes that the unmarried (*hoi agamoi*) here may refer not only to those men not yet married but also to those who are now unmarried, that is, those men whose spouse having died are, therefore, widowers. We think that the unmarried meant here are the widowers. Paul's advice to them and to the widows is that they stay unmarried. Why he suggests that they maintain *status quo* is not immediately clear. In the previous passage vv. 1-7, when he said, "I wish that all were as I myself am" (v. 7a), he was pointing to celibacy as a gift without belittling marriage, which he considered as another kind of gift (v. 7b). Now, however, he is not alluding to the gift of celibacy but asking the widowers and widows to remain as they are, without marrying (v. 8) for a reason not obvious from the immediate context. However, in vv. 25-40, where also in speaking to the unmarried, the engaged and the widows, he says, "it is well for a person to remain as he is" (v. 26b). In this case the reason given is "in view of the impending distress" (v. 26a). By remaining as they are they are in a better position to prepare for the Lord's coming (vv. 29-35). Paul's eschatological intent becomes clear. The exception to the *status quo* will come should a person find self-restraint in sexual matters difficult. For Paul to be aflame with passion and then suffer from a lack of self-control is worse than trying to preserve the *status quo*.

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7 *Ibid.*, 104.



### iii. 1Cor 7: 10-11

In addressing those within Christian marriages, he lays on them the Lord's command that their union is for life (cf. also v. 39).<sup>8</sup> While he declares a husband should not *divorce* his wife (v. 11b), which seems to have come as an afterthought,<sup>9</sup> he says to the wife that she should not *separate* from her husband. Why does Paul use different verbs? Is something to be made of it? Is Paul alluding to Deut 24:1-4 where by only a man could divorce but not the woman? But in such a case the man divorcing a woman would give her a bill of divorce which would permit her to marry again. But Paul in v. 11 asks the woman to continue to remain (the present imperative is used) single or else to be reconciled to her husband. In any case Paul uses the verb "to divorce" indiscriminately of both man and woman in vv. 12-13 which probably suggests that the custom of a woman divorcing a man was known in Corinth.<sup>10</sup>

### iv. 1 Cor 7: 12-16

Here Paul addresses "the rest" from within the married people. Since our main objective is to look at the Pauline privilege which relates to this section, we shall deal with these verses separately in the second part of this article.

### v. 1 Cor 7: 17-24

If the major portion of 1 Cor 7 concerns itself with marriage, how do vv. 17-24 fit in this context? We believe Paul's answers to Corinthian concerns reflect really how he perceives society under three relations: the religio-cultural (race), the socio-economic (class) and the male-female (gender) relationships. It was the baptismal rite that brought to the fore how a Christian needed to transcend barriers in respect to these relations. Gal 3:28 is a classic expression of what a Christian is called to experience in Christ: "There is no longer Jew

8 But see J. M.-O'Connor, "The Divorced Woman in 1 Cor 7: 10-11," *JBL* 100 (1981) 606, who thinks that by means of the parenthesis, *ouk egō alla ho kyrios*, Paul draws our attention to Jesus' prohibition much more as an "afterthought because of its pastoral utility" than as a normative principle.

9 According to R.A. Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 99.

10 B. Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, 176.

or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female.”<sup>11</sup> “Paul has this triad of social relations in mind as he moves to illustrate a principle pertinent to the one, marriage relations, from the other two, Jew-Gentile and slave-free. The three sets of relations, however, are not symmetrical and analogical, and Paul must make an exception to his ‘rule’ in all the assemblies.”<sup>12</sup>

In vv. 17-24 after underlining the general rule or *status quo* to be maintained in v. 17, Paul deals with the religio-cultural and the socio-economic relations in these verses. Though Paul is addressing two relations, the Jew-Greek and slave-free here, he ends up giving only one exception which pertains to the latter. If nearly all Corinthians were “uncircumcised”<sup>13</sup> then the question of an exception in relation to the former does not arise. The exception in relation to the slave-free (v. 21b), however, has been problematic in the sense that some scholars<sup>14</sup> and some versions, notably the NRSV, have translated v. 21b thus: “make use of your present condition (i.e., slavery) now more than ever.” Such a meaning of the verse makes no room for an exception. What we need to observe, however, is that

The social relationships of slave-free were not analogous to those of married-single or circumcised- uncircumcised. People in the latter circumstances had at least some possibility of changing their status. Slaves, however, had little power to affect their status. Their potential emancipation was strictly in the hands of their master. There would have been little point in instructing slaves about to be freed by their master to ‘make use of your present condition (i.e., slavery) now more than ever’ since they had no choice in the matter.<sup>15</sup>

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11 While the Jew-Greek relations in Galatia posed a problem, Paul was much occupied with the socio- economic and the male-female relations in Corinth, that of religio-cultural being only incidental.

12 R.A. Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 100-101.

13 *Ibid.*, 101.

14 For e.g., C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, BNTC, London, A & C Black, <sup>2</sup>1971, 170-171; H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, Hermeneia, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1975, 127.

15 R.A. Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 102.

Hence, we must treat v. 21b as an exception<sup>16</sup> which should read; "But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity."<sup>17</sup> What do exceptions say of Paul? That he was not hard and fast in interpreting life's relations. While he considered it important to maintain *status quo* he was equally open to admit exceptions. That reveals Paul in a humane light.

vi. 1 Cor 7: 25-38

We believe that Paul having finished addressing the concerns within marriage and of married people in 1Cor 7:1-16, he now turns to those not yet married in 1Cor 7: 25-38,<sup>18</sup> after having briefly considered the Jew-Greek and slave-free relations in vv. 17-24. He begins this section with "And now concerning" (*peri de*). This must signal the unmarried group as different from the one encountered until v. 16 which addressed those already married. Paul uses the noun *ho/hē agamos* four times in 1Cor 7.<sup>19</sup> The usage is interesting. The noun has been translated as "the unmarried" (RSV). But what does it imply? There are three possibilities:

- i) that a person has not entered into marriage yet
- ii) that one's spouse having died, he/she is now unmarried
- iii) that one having separated from one's spouse, he/she is now unmarried.

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16 G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT, Grand Rapids, W.B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1987, 318. Fee draws our attention to the fact that the pattern throughout the chapter makes room at every point for exception to a prior imperative. Hence, "it would be highly unusual for this one 'exception' to be no exception at all, but rather an intensification of the imperative."

17 B. Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, 181-185 for a useful discussion on why a slave may set aside the *status quo* "stay as you are" and avail himself the exception if freedom is offered.

18 *Ibid.*, 177 where Witherington speaks of three categories of people: widows may remarry; separated women must return to their husbands if they wish to be married which suggests they may have contemplated other unions; and more strikingly he encourages women who desire to remain single to do so for the Lord's sake.

19 K. Niederwimmer, "Gameō," in *EDNT*, 1. 236 where he indicates the different uses of *ho/hē agamos*.

If we are right in saying that Paul is examining the concerns of only the already married in vv. 1-16, then the masculine plural *hoi agamoi* in v. 8 must refer to the widowers.<sup>20</sup> Paul addresses them and the widows so as to oblige them both to maintain *status quo* by not marrying. Here is the use of *ho agamos* in the sense of ii) above. In v. 11, Paul asks the woman who has separated from her husband to continue with the *status quo* as unmarried. He uses the feminine singular, *hē agamos*. Here we have the sense found in iii) above. In vv. 25-38, we believe Paul is addressing those until now unmarried and telling them the advantages of staying unmarried, and we have the third meaning of *ho/hē agamos*, namely i) above. Here we allude to v. 32b and v. 34b where these nouns are in the singular, masculine and feminine respectively. It is best for the unmarried man and woman to preserve *status quo* so that they can devote themselves to the affairs of the Lord. The exception however always exists and Paul is not going to lay any restraint on anyone wanting to marry (v. 35).

But, how sure can we be that in vv. 32-34 Paul is not addressing ii) above? He begins with the unmarried, that is, J. Fitzmyer believes Paul is referring here to the virgin state of both unmarried men and women (*ai parthenoi*) in v. 25.<sup>21</sup> His advice to them is to remain as they are in view of the impending distress. Just as in v. 8, we have the use of the plural in v. 25, which must indicate that a group is being addressed. In v. 8 it is the widowers and widows, here in v. 25 it is the virgins, that is unmarried men and women. He next depicts in vv. 32-35 the anxieties a married man or woman must go through which in Paul's opinion will not secure their undivided devotion to the Lord if they are married. We believe if Paul had intended to speak about widowers in v. 32b he would have spoken of widows in v. 34b, whereas he speaks of *hē agamos* in the sense of *hē parthenos*. The latter two nouns are in apposition in v. 34b, the second explaining the first.

Again, could Paul have used *ho/hē agamos* in vv. 32-34 in the sense of iii) above? The sense of iii) reflects v. 11a, where admittedly, Paul is speaking in a conditional manner, i.e., should a woman separate from a man and not vice-versa because in v. 11b a husband is told not

20 *Ibid.*, 1. 236, where Niederwimmer thinks the plural refers to the unmarried of both sexes.

21 J. Fitzmyer, "Parthenos," in *EDNT*, 3. 40.



to divorce his wife. In v. 11a it is the separation of the wife that is addressed. And, if the unmarried in vv. 32-34 reflect the unmarried woman of v. 11a, we may ask how much would a woman, who finding herself unmarried after having separated from her husband, be now anxious to please the Lord? Though this is not impossible, it appears unlikely because what was said of v. 34b in relation to ii) above must be said also in relation to iii), that is, *hē agamos* is being used here in the sense of *hē parthenos*. That is, a virgin is anxious about the affairs of the Lord which devotion one may not expect from separated women especially if they were contemplating other unions.<sup>22</sup> Paul's injunction to the separated woman that she continue to remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband (v. 11) makes it evident that such was the case. Therefore, it is best to treat of vv. 25-35 as dealing with the status of the really unmarried.

There is yet another problem. If v. 25 introduces the section dealing with the truly unmarried, how do we understand vv. 27-28? We need to examine whether or not these latter verses connect to v. 25? If these do not then it would be possible for us to look at v. 27 as referring to married couples to whom Paul, after having elaborated the advantages of maintaining *status quo*, allows the privilege of remarriage on separation or divorce. Both man and woman who remarry are said not to incur sin (v. 28). This kind of reasoning is arrived at by seeing the verb "loose" (*luō*) as being the opposite of "bind" (*deō*). In marriage the husband is bound (*dedesai*) to his wife. But when Paul asks the question, "are you free (*lelusai*) from a wife?" does he intend by the use of this verb to suggest the separated/divorced state of the man? If so, he now being unmarried does not incur sin should he marry again.<sup>23</sup> But the question to be raised is this: Why should the opposite of "bound in marriage" be "separated/divorced from marriage"? The opposite of "bound in marriage" is more likely to be "free from marriage," that is, one who is truly unmarried because *luō* does have this meaning as well.<sup>24</sup> Why would

22 B. Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, 177.

23 C. Brown, "Separate," in *NIDNTT*, 3. 537.

24 K. Kertelge, "Luō," in *EDNT*, 2. 368, where he also says: "In 1Cor 7:27 pf. *lelusai* appears with the meaning *be free* (of the marital bond to a wife) without an indication of the previous marital bond".

Paul choose to allow remarriage here in vv. 27-28 when he has precluded such an understanding in v. 11 where he has clearly asked the separated woman either to remain unmarried or return to her husband?<sup>25</sup> Therefore, vv. 27-28 do not seem to oppose v. 25? Instead, what if, in vv. 27-28, Paul were addressing the case of an unmarried man who had had a woman as his betrothed?<sup>26</sup> If such were the case Paul would be encouraging such a man to keep to his betrothed without marrying her (as in v. 37) or if unmarried, and, not betrothed either, to not look for marriage for reasons already stated earlier.<sup>27</sup> However, if an unmarried person or a betrothed married his fiancé they did not sin. This understanding makes more sense because it is picked up again in vv. 36-38, where clearly the exception of engaged couples marrying is made on account of lack of self-restraint on the part of the man towards his virgin. Again, here the fact that they do not sin is repeated (v. 36). This means that when Paul uses expressions such as, "you do not sin" or "it is no sin" he is only allaying the fears of some who seem to have an ascetic view of marriage. These expressions, therefore, do not suggest that Paul has allowed remarriage in opposition to the Lord's command and for which reason he must now dispel their fear of incurring sin. The exception, that is, marriage, is seen as good but the maintenance of the *status quo*, that is, refraining from marriage, is said to be better (v. 38).

However, what emerges from the above discussion is that for Paul abstinence from sexual expression in marriage can be justified only in light of our Christian purpose, the present circumstances, and/or our expectation of Christ's imminent return, but never on the ground

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25 On the other hand, if even Jesus allowed for the Old Testament permission for divorce and remarriage "for the hardness of your hearts," which we may interpret as being unchastity or what we call today an "irretrievable breakdown," Paul's concession (exception) here would be along the same lines. See here, A. C. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians. A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary*, 117.

26 C.H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians. A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, New York, The Crossroad Publ. Co., 1989, 49.

27 The use of *hē parthenos* in vv. 36-38 is different from the way it is used in vv. 25-35. It is best to see the word here as meaning "either the virgin that the man is engaged to or his virgin wife." See here J. Fitzmyer, "Parthenos," in *EDNT*, 3, 40

that sexual relations within marriage are evil *per se*. He values celibacy as a gift and not an obligation in view of the Lord's coming. He, therefore, urges abstinence from sexual expression in marriage or avoidance of marriage, that is, a life of celibacy, of those who can accept it voluntarily. In brief that would reflect his insistence on maintaining the *status quo*. To insist on celibacy, however, when one has no gift for it can only set one aflame with passion and be a temptation to immorality, thus causing havoc within the Christian community. Those with the gift of marriage, therefore, must marry, it is no sin. The latter consideration points to the exception that Paul will make time and again.<sup>28</sup>

#### vii. 1 Cor 7: 39-40

Why would Paul want to restate something he has already implied in v. 10? We think that Paul here is making his final conclusion that takes its force from the Lord's command. That marriage is for life is the vital *status quo* that Paul maintains and on it hinges every other rule or exception he has made. The *status quo* or stability of marriage may not be frustrated. Whether some "(Corinthian) women were separating from their husbands for ascetic motives"<sup>29</sup> or "they may have been contemplating other unions,"<sup>30</sup> Paul's answer to them is the same: Marriage is for life. The exception in v. 11a is that if she separates she should remain unmarried and the exception in v. 39b is that she may marry again only if her husband dies and even so only to a Christian.

### Conclusion

When certain women admit an ascetical emphasis regarding marriage which would have suited Paul fine in his eschatological view of things, he maintains the *status quo* of relations within marriage with a minor exception that does not take away from the essence of marriage but rather enhances it. When certain women Paul expects

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28 R. N. Longenecker, *Paul, Apostle of Liberty*, Grand Rapids, Baker, 1976, 239; also K. Niederwimmer, *Gameō*, in *EDNT*, I.237.

29 R.A. Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 109.

30 B. Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, 177.

would want to separate from their husbands, he maintains once more the *status quo* of unity and indissolubility of marriage by appealing to the Lord's command and again with an exception, that if they separate they should stay unmarried or marry "in the Lord" only after their husband's death. The fact that he does not suggest remarriage while the husband still lives, works towards upholding the sanctity of the *status quo*. It would appear that Paul wants to preserve *status quo* in every circumstance that comes under the purview of the Lord's command (vv. 2-3, 10, 39a) but to grant an exception only those times it does not clearly violate the Lord's command (vv. 6, 11a, 39b) or when the *status quo* has been suggested by himself (vv. 8, 12-13, 17-18, 20, 24, 26-27, 40a). In any case Paul does not require the *status quo* for any ascetical reasons the Corinthians may have entertained, for any such ascetic piety he clearly opposes.<sup>31</sup> Much more the Pauline *status quo* is directed towards those who are guided solely by this-worldly concerns and who therefore fail to grasp what it means to live in the eschatological age. "The tandem of the *certainty* of the already of Christ's death and resurrection and the *possibility* of the nearness of the not-yet is the reason for this advice."<sup>32</sup>

## 2. The Pauline Privilege in 1 Cor 7:12-16

Here we try to see the import of vv. 12-16 in the context of 1Cor 7. We shall consider the salient aspects that bring out the Pauline concession in full relief.

### a) "The Rest" (*hoi loipoi*): The Pauline Addressees

If our surmise that in vv. 1-16 Paul is addressing the married is correct, then "to the rest" (*Tois de loipois*), in v. 12, must designate those married people whose marriage is outside the categories mentioned in vv. 8-9 or 10-11. How do we understand "the rest" (*hoi loipoi*)? Two meanings are possible:

- i) Much before Paul came preaching in Corinth two unbelievers were married to each other but subsequent to his preaching one of them converted to the faith.

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31 R.A. Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 107-108.

32 B. Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, 179.



- ii) That subsequent to Paul's preaching in Corinth an unbeliever who converted to the Christian faith nonetheless took an unbeliever as his/her spouse.

Scholars have debated the situation on hand. Opinion i) is the easiest. However, opinion ii) is not impossible. That means, subsequent to Paul's visit to Corinth, we cannot exclude the possibility that some believers married unbelievers. At the time of Paul's writing the situation of mixed marriages existed. The injunction that a Christian widow for example can marry only "in the Lord" (v. 39b) does not necessarily hold here because Paul would have preferred her to remain unmarried so that she devote herself to the Lord. And the command that she may marry only in the Lord, it would appear, is a way of restricting her options. Whether, Paul had had any restrictions in place for those marrying for the first time we cannot be sure. His words are quite universal, "if any brother/woman...."<sup>33</sup> Besides, at least at the time of writing, he appears optimistic of mixed marriages for not only does he say that the Christian partner must not divorce the unbeliever but he also says that the unbelieving partner is made holy through the Christian partner and further that their children are holy.<sup>34</sup> We might ask would Paul be making this twin assertion as being applicable only once, that is, to the Corinthian situation alone, as if never to be repeated. If the answer should be yes and for that reason opinion ii) is considered impossible and only opinion i) is admitted then the canonical Pauline privilege gets more restricted than Paul's original use should opinion ii) have also been correct. It would be preferable to surmise that the original cases reflect not merely the situation described in opinion i) but also that in opinion ii) because Paul as such believes that the unbelieving partner is made holy through the Christian partner and further that their children are holy, no matter how such a union between a believer and an unbeliever came about. Otherwise we run the risk of limiting holiness only to a

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33 B. Byron, "1Cor 7:10-15: A Basis for Future Catholic Discipline on Marriage and Divorce," *TS* 34 (1973) 432.

34 J. Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (Trans. J.W. Fraser), Grand Rapids, W.B. Eerdmans Publ., Co., 1996, 148 succinctly observes: "The godliness of the one does more to 'sanctify' the marriage than the ungodliness of the other to make it 'unclean'."

situation described under i) as if the baptism of an unbelieving partner is the moment when the marriage and the offspring within that marriage becomes holy. What then do we say of a situation given under ii)? Can an already baptized person not have a sanctifying effect on the unbelieving partner if he should marry him/her as seen in ii)? In short, can we limit God's sanctifying action only to a type of situation envisaged under i)?<sup>35</sup> Hence "Paul's words in vv. 12-15 apply to all marriages between believers and unbelievers, whether they took place before or after the former's conversion."<sup>36</sup>

**b) Paul Asks "The Rest" to Observe Status Quo**

Whether Paul, in vv. 12-16, is addressing a direct query from Corinthians themselves or making his own observation, he sticks to his general guidelines concerning maintenance of the *status quo*; here the maintenance of the *status quo* of marriage between the believer and unbeliever. Were some Corinthians objecting to such a union, either already taken place or about to take place in the foreseeable future, on the basis of their sexual asceticism to which we have alluded earlier? Were some Corinthians of the opinion that their spiritual status in connection with their sexual asceticism was at stake if they married or continued in marriage to unbelievers? If this is what they thought, Paul would be telling them that by upholding such marriages their spiritual status was never being brought into question. If a departure from holiness was the issue Paul creates a twist here; you do not lose your holiness by maintaining such marriages instead you have the opportunity of extending it to the unbelieving partner.<sup>37</sup> Paul maintains that the believer has a sanctifying effect on

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35 *Ibid.* Calvin observes that Paul "is speaking here, not about the contracting of marriages, but about maintaining those which have already been entered into."

36 B. Byron, "1Cor 7:10-15: A Basis for Future Catholic Discipline on Marriage and Divorce," 432; but see A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, ICC, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1914, 142 where he thinks Paul is not approving such wedlock. According to him, marriages with heathen are wrong (2Cor 6:14).

37 R.A. Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 100. He thinks "Paul is appealing specifically to certain women," 99. See also in the same vein, J. P. Sampley, "The First Letter to the Corinthians," in *NIB*, 12 vols., Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2002,

the unbelieving partner and also on the child born to that union. The meaning we give to v. 16 concerning the salvation of the unbelieving partner is dependent on how we understand v. 15.

**c) The Unbeliever: The Meaning of *Apiston***

It is important what we take "unbeliever" (*apiston*) to mean in these verses. R. F. Collins understands the word could be taken in reference to either "a sense of belief" or "a sense of bonding." That is, is one an unbeliever in the sense that he lacks faith, in the sense of belief, or that he lacks that quality of faithfulness one would find in a friend? The word "faithful" (*pistos*) in the sense of bonding was regularly used among Hellenistic moralists as a quality one would expect to find in a friend. Paul, with one exception of Gal 3:9 where it refers to Abraham, does not use the adjective "faithful" (*pistos*) to refer to a believer. He uses "unfaithful" (*apistos*) only in the Corinthian correspondence. Hence the use of this adjective may connote a sense of lack of bonding rather than a sense of lack of belief.<sup>38</sup> What can we make of this? What would be the implications of saying that the two are allowed to separate in view of the unbeliever's lacking that quality of faithfulness rather than his/her lacking a sense of belief? We may ask if the former were true how Paul could expect the unbeliever to consent to live with the believer when the unbeliever lacked that quality of faithfulness or bonding (vv. 12-13). And, furthermore, Paul's desire in wanting the Corinthians to understand

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10.877, who believes that "the Corinthians who formulated their wisdom in the maxim, 'It is good for a man not to touch a woman' (7:1) may have pressed this view on married persons with the arguments that for married believers divorce would be best but, failing that abstinence from sexual relations was required and that being married to unbelievers was simply untenable on any grounds. If so, Paul has countered their teaching in several particulars!" See also R.B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, Louisville, John Knox Press, 1997, 122, who thinks that "Paul's openness to maintaining mixed marriages must have seemed like a puzzling compromise to those at Corinth who were pressing the community to adopt radical ascetic standards."

38 R.F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, SP, Collegeville, The Liturgical Press, 1999, 271. He gives the following texts where Paul uses *apistos*: 1Cor 6:6; 7:12, 13, 14, 15; 10:27; 14:22, 23, 24; 2Cor 4:4; 6:14, 15.

how mixed marriages contribute to making the unbelieving partner holy could not have been expected if the latter only failed to manifest a quality of faithfulness. Therefore, when Paul appeals to holiness in vv. 12-14 it must be because he understands unbelievers to be lacking in a sense of belief rather than a sense of bonding. Paul, however, does not tell us what he means by holiness. How indeed is one who lacks a sense of belief sanctified? H. Conzelmann thinks that "through the believing partner, the marriage between a pagan and a Christian is withdrawn from the control of the powers of the world."<sup>39</sup>

**d) The Corinthian Profile:**

***Their Stand Concerning Mixed Marriages***

There is however also the opinion that not all Corinthians were unified in their ascetical stand against mixed marriages.<sup>40</sup> S. Kubo<sup>41</sup> thinks there were two groups in Corinth and that Paul deals with them differently in vv. 12-16. The first group consists of those Christians who want to put away their non-Christian partner (vv. 12-13) probably because the former considered their relationship, in the light of their new found faith, unclean. To them Paul instructs why they must maintain their marriage (v. 14). The second group of Corinthians wants to maintain their marriage bond with the non-Christians in the hope of their eventual conversion but the latter, however, want to depart (v. 15ab). Paul here instructs the Christian party to let go of the marriage tie not only for the sake of peace but also because they cannot guarantee they will indeed save the non-Christian partner especially if the latter wants to separate (vv. 15c-16). In her doctoral dissertation, J. Dorcas Gordon<sup>42</sup> seems to accept Kubo's conclusions and has tried to show that in Corinth we are dealing with two opposing factions. One group advocates sexual abstinence (v. 1) and falls in line with the Pauline *status quo* of

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39 H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 122.

40 B. Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, 178 says: "In Christian Corinth there were both renouncers and over-indulgers."

41 S. Kubo, "1 Corinthians VII. 16: Optimistic or Pessimistic?," *NTS* 24 (1978) 539-544.

42 J. D. Gordon, *Sister or Wife? 1 Corinthians 7 and Cultural Anthropology*, JSNTSS, Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1997, 119-122.



remaining single (v. 8), whereas the other has difficulty in accepting such an ideal. To the latter group it would seem Paul advocates marriage and sexual relations in order to avoid immorality (v. 2) or loss of self-control (v. 9). Are we justified in seeking two groups in Corinth? In the context of vv. 1-9, it would seem Paul is addressing in both vv. 2 and 9 not two groups but just one group, the ascetical group. For example he speaks of temptation to immorality in v. 2 and lack of self-control in v. 9 not as characteristics of a separate group but as something which even the so called ascetically oriented could succumb to. Therefore, the Pauline exceptions in vv. 5 and 9 are not a compromise solution that is intended to overcome the differences between two groups. They provide a way out of having to maintain the *status quo*, except the *status quo* of unity and indissolubility of marriage according to the Lord's command, so that in Paul's view those who comply with the *status quo* are said to do better than those who choose the exception. Nevertheless, the latter do not stand to lose their status before God in any way.

Similarly, it would seem that in vv. 12-16 we are not dealing with two groups because v. 15 begins with *de* which must be taken more as an adversative "but" than as a conjunction "and." If so, v. 15 must relate to the foregoing and not to a new section. Further, akin to other cases in 1Cor 7, beginning with v. 15 we have the Pauline exception to the implied Lord's command that marriages are forever. The Lord's command found in v. 10 is implied in vv. 12-14 even though Paul begins with "I say, not the Lord." This distinction is accounted for when we consider Paul has no special revelation from the Lord concerning this matter of mixed marriages, especially the case when one party obeys the teaching on marriage and the other does not.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, to the extent that Paul asks the Christian party to maintain the *status quo* of marriage, he is upholding the Lord's command concerning the unity and indissolubility of marriage and to the extent that he grants an exception precisely because the non-Christian party does not uphold the Lord's command, he is giving his own opinion.<sup>44</sup>

43 B. Byron, "1Cor 7:10-15: A Basis for Future Catholic Discipline on Marriage and Divorce," 431.

44 J. D. Gordon, *Sister or Wife? 1 Corinthians 7 and Cultural Anthropology*, 121, see fn. 82, where she says that in vv. 12-16, it would appear that the

It is therefore better to see vv. 12-16 as dealing with a single situation of mixed marriages wherein the Christian party wants to divorce the non-Christian party and Paul tells the former not to. And, this single situation of mixed marriages has but one exception, namely v. 15. Before we look into the reasons for the exception, let us examine the reasons for the *status quo*.

**e) The Rationale for the Status Quo:**

***Paul's Positive Outlook on Mixed Marriages***

If Paul encourages those unmarried, whether widows, widowers (v. 8) or the really unmarried (vv. 25-26) or the engaged (vv. 37-38a) to maintain *status quo* by remaining single, he asks the Christian married (v. 10) and those married to unbelievers (vv. 12-14) to maintain *status quo* by remaining married. We have seen earlier why Paul asks the Corinthians to remain as they are. By remaining single they can better prepare for the coming of the Lord. It will help them inculcate in themselves a sense of living in the eschatological age; whereas it remains unclear whether the Corinthians shared in Paul's sense of purpose when they advised abstinence from marriage and sexual relations from an ascetical bias. For clearly, at least in vv. 12-14, in asking the Christian party to remain married to the unbeliever, Paul espouses a different viewpoint from the Corinthians, who it would appear, want to be rid of the marriage bond. Very briefly, we may surmise: The *status quo* (remaining single/unmarried, circumcised or uncircumcised without change, or as a slave) that is linked to Paul's opinion always has an eschatological purpose behind it, whereas the *status quo* (remaining married) that is linked to the Lord's command, has always the aspect of unity and indissolubility of marriage behind it, which aspect also Paul is eager to uphold as is evident not only in v. 10 but in vv. 12-14 as well.

We have briefly noted that Paul asks the Christian party to stay with the marriage to an unbeliever for by it the latter is sanctified and so are children born to that union. Paul uses the verb "made holy," *hēgiastai*, in the perfect tense, suggesting an action in the past; probably referring to the baptism of the Christian that has continuing effects in the present.<sup>45</sup> Such a stance goes clearly against Paul's

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general principle is not easily discerned, rather we just have the concession clause followed by the rationale for that concession.

45 R.F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, 266.

pharisaic background that would see a pure person as defiled by contact with the unclean. However, "the logic here is exactly the reverse of the logic of defilement that Paul has used earlier in the argument (union with a prostitute defiles Christ, 6:15-17; bad leaven leavens the whole lump of dough, 5:6). Here, Paul reverses the metaphor and asserts that, within the family at least, holiness is more powerful than impurity."<sup>46</sup> It would appear Paul uses the logic of defilement only in cases involving immorality and not otherwise. The continuing effects of holiness work towards the transformation of the unbelieving partner. "The claim of 7:14 is that the power of holiness is so encompassing that it can draw the unholy into its field of force and transform it."<sup>47</sup> Here is Paul's positive outlook on mixed marriages.

f) "Peace": A Reason in support of the  
*Status Quo* or the Exception?

In vv. 12-16 there are three realities we need to take into account:

- i) There is Paul's encouragement to the Christian partner to continue in marriage to the unbeliever in view of the holiness of the marriage (v. 14).
- ii) But (*de*), if there be a desire on the part of the unbelieving partner to separate, Paul responds: *chōrizesthō*. Paul has used the present passive imperative, which may be translated "let him/her be separated." He then goes on to say, "the brother or the sister is not bound (*ou dedoulōtai*) in such cases (*en tois toioutois*). But (*de*) to peace God has called us/you." Whether Paul addresses "us/you" needs to be looked into (v. 15).
- iii) There is the idea of the salvation of the unbelieving partner (v. 16) whether in relation to i) or ii) above needs to be decided.

At the same time we must ask which of the three acts as the controlling motif in vv. 12-16. From our discussion above in 2.d) if we may be certain that in these verses we are not dealing with two groups but only one, then as in the rest of 1Cor 7, we may discern here too a pattern of *status quo* and its related exception side by

46 R.B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, 121. Compare this to Rom 11:16: "If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy."

47 *Ibid.*, 132.

side. In this case, the Pauline exception is provided in v. 15ab. But the question is whether v. 15c provides the reason for this exception or whether it expands on the reason (v. 14) for the *status quo* of vv. 12-13. Therefore, v. 15c must be looked upon as the controlling motif as it could be interpreted either way. If that is granted then Paul would be saying: "Do not divorce your unbelieving partner for not only your partner but the children born to you are made holy through such a marriage. But if the unbelieving partner, not you, desires to separate, let him/her separate. The brother or the sister is not bound to hold on to the marriage in such cases even though our Lord said marriages are for life."<sup>48</sup> But how we interpret what Paul says next is crucial: "But to peace God has called us/you." What is the meaning we give to "peace"? There are two possibilities and depending on the nuance we accept, v. 15c could be either expanding on the reason (v. 14) for the *status quo* of vv. 12-13 or providing the reason for the exception (v. 15ab):

i) Is Paul alluding to peace that is opposite to clash in marriage or more precisely to deeper nuances such as that brought about through reconciliation and sanctification? It has been shown that the latter meaning is found abundantly in Paul especially in Rom; 1Cor; Gal etc.<sup>49</sup> Again, if the testimony of the superior Alexandrian (p 46; B) together with the Western (DFG) witnesses which supports "us" is taken then all the more, we ought to read v. 15c thus: "But to peace (that works towards reconciliation) God has called all of us." If so, Paul after having stated the exception in v. 15ab, would now be expanding on the reason for staying in mixed marriages (v. 14), that is, by not divorcing.<sup>50</sup> That means, if the unbelieving partner desires to separate, let him/her separate. The brother or the sister is not bound to hold on to the marriage in such cases. However,

48 A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 143, say: "All that *ou dedoulōtai* clearly means is that he or she need not feel so bound by Christ's prohibition of divorce as to be afraid to depart when the heathen partner insists on separation."

49 V. Hasler, "eirēnē," in *EDNT*, 1, 396.

50 R.A. Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 100 maintains that vv.15c-16 expand on the reason for staying in such marriages.



the Christian ideal is to work towards reconciliation in marriage as we have it in v. 11. If we see "peace" in this way, v. 15c may not be taken as the reason for the exception in v. 15ab but as expanding on the reason (v. 14) for the *status quo* of vv. 12-13. Following from this, v. 16 namely, the salvation of the partner, becomes a definite outcome of such marriages should the reconciliation take place. If earlier in vv. 12-14, we had had only the holiness of the unbelieving partner (v. 14) given as the reason for staying married now the Christian partner can look for the salvation of the unbelieving partner as well. The preposition "for" (*gar*) that occurs twice and introduces both v. 14 and v. 16 could be seen as providing two conclusions which together serve as reasons for the maintenance of the *status quo*, that is, by staying in marriage. This is the optimistic reading of v. 16 which supplements that in v. 14 precisely because v. 15c is held not to be a reason for the exception (v. 15ab) but because it expands on the reason (v. 14) for the maintenance of the *status quo* (vv. 12-13).

ii) However, must we take only v. 15ab or the entire v. 15 as the exception? If the entire v. 15 is the exception then v. 15c will serve as the reason for the exception (v. 15ab) and not as an expansion on the reason for the *status quo*. We would need to take v. 15 as a parenthetical limitation<sup>51</sup> in which case the meaning of v. 16 would in turn come out pessimistic or perhaps, even better, uncertain. The meaning we have is: "But if the unbelieving partner, not you, desires to separate, let him/her separate. The brother or the sister is not bound to hold on to the marriage in such cases, for to peace (understood here as absence of clash) God has called us." Paul would be speaking inclusively. Pessimistically understood v. 16 would mean: "how can you be sure that by working towards reconciliation when your unbelieving partner desires to separate,

51 However, J. B. Lightfoot, *Notes on Epistles of St. Paul from Unpublished Commentaries*, London, Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1904, 226 restricts the parenthetical limitation to v. 15ab only. He believes the reference to peace in v. 15c must extend to the whole section, from vv. 12 onwards. A Christian must radiate peace at all times.

you will actually convert and therefore save your partner?" However, similarly, by taking v. 15c as the reason for the exception (v. 15ab), Paul could very well be expressing some uncertainty in v. 16. He could be saying "even though you are unable to hold on to the marriage and you must separate, there is the encouragement 'you never know,' 'you cannot assume' that your partner will not be saved." To put it more clearly v. 16 will read: "how do you know whether you will or will not save your partner."<sup>52</sup> That means Paul favours separation rather than maintenance of marriage for the sake of the peace of the Christian partner. The idea of reconciliation at any cost simply does not work. And, if separation is a must for the sake of peace, here we would think Paul is deliberately describing the outcome concerning the unbelieving spouse in terms that appear more uncertain than pessimistic. The preposition "for" (*gar*) of v. 16 is then largely unrelated to that of v. 14 and must serve as providing some comfort to the Christian partner who had had to let go of his unbelieving partner for the sake of peace.

Which of the two options above merits our consideration? If option i) is taken then v. 15c expands on the reason for the *status quo* and the exception (v. 15ab) is left without a reason. An examination of the table 1.b) i. above shows us that whenever Paul speaks of an exception he also consistently provides a reason for that exception. The advantage of taking opinion ii) is that v. 15c serves as the reason for the exception (v. 15ab) in the context of vv. 12-16. The ascetically motivated Corinthians might have wanted to set aside their unbelieving partners because they considered their marriage bond unholy. However, Paul must provide a reason to uphold the Lord's command when the Corinthians want to divorce their unbelieving partner. He maintains that they cannot give up their unbelieving partner for their marriage is holy. But, Paul does make an exception when the unbelieving partner wants to separate. He says in such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved to such a marriage and even more besides if peace is going to be denied by staying together in marriage.

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52 This meaning is preferred by A. C. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians. A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary*, 109.

The same could never be held true in the case of a marriage between Christians when one partner wanted to separate. That means, Christian marriage admits neither divorce itself nor remarriage as a result of divorce. But in the context of a mixed marriage does Paul permit remarriage of the Christian when the unbelieving partner has departed?

## Conclusion

In vv.10-11 Paul tells the Christian wife that the Lord commands her not separate (*chōristhēnai*) from her Christian husband. But if she should separate (*chōristhē(i)*), she must remain single or else be reconciled to her husband. Whereas, the husband is told he must not divorce (*aphienai*) his wife. We had asked earlier if something ought to be made of the two different verbs Paul uses in connection with man and woman leaving their spouse. In the Old Testament we observe only a man could divorce his wife (Deut 24:1-4). In Corinth perhaps the practice of women departing from their husbands was known. Whereas, Paul says nothing to the man should he divorce his wife, he instructs the wife to either remain single or be reconciled to her husband. It would appear that while his injunction to the husband that he should not divorce his wife is an afterthought, perhaps his real concern lay with wives deserting their husbands. To them he says they should not separate from their husbands. Does Paul in using the word “separate” incline us towards a view that while men divorced their wives with no thought of their return as it remained forbidden for them to take back their divorced wives (Deut 4:4), women, on the other hand, could only separate from their husbands with the eventual possibility of their being reconciled to their husbands? In the setting of mixed marriages, however, Paul has used the two verbs “divorce” and “separate” indiscriminately (vv. 12-15). The possibility of a woman divorcing her husband is acknowledged (v. 13). We wish at this point to compare v. 15 with vv. 10-11. While very clearly, in v. 11, Paul asks the Christian woman to either remain single or to be reconciled to her husband, v. 15 in using the same verb “separate” twice gives a new twist. There are two points we must consider:

- i) v. 15b: “the brother or sister in such cases (*en tois toioutois*) is not bound.” The thought behind the expression, “in such cases” is in contrast to a different context, namely that of v. 11, where the woman who separated either had to remain single

or had had to be reconciled to her husband. Separation could eventually lead to reconciliation. That case was within a Christian context but here the situation is different. And what is the difference? We come to the next consideration.

ii) "In such cases the brother or sister is not bound (*ou dedoulōtai*). The idea here is that the Christian partner must not consider himself/herself enslaved to a marriage to an unbeliever if the latter wishes to separate. The Christian partner is entitled to peace. Paul has refrained from using the more common verb "bind" (*deō*) which he uses in a marriage context involving two Christians (e.g., 1Cor 7:27,39; Rom 7:2).<sup>53</sup> In v. 11 the separated woman had to either remain single or eventually return to her husband. The thought here was that a Christian marriage was for life. But the use of the verb "enslave" (*douloō*)<sup>54</sup> in the negative expressed in the perfect tense in v. 15 suggests the present state of marriage need not continue. The verb *douloō* used here refers to spiritual and moral bondage.<sup>55</sup>

In the light of the two above considerations together, we believe Paul permits divorce in the context of all marriages between believers and unbelievers, whether they took place before or after the former's conversion. And having permitted divorce in such a context of mixed marriage the partners found themselves, he may have also been amenable to the remarriage of the Christian partner. That is, though he does not expressly state that the Christian may remarry, he does not forbid remarriage as he explicitly did for the separated wife

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53 F. Staudinger, "deō," in *EDNT*, 1. 293. He says the verb is used in a figurative sense for binding of man and woman in marriage, founded on the order of creation and in the law.

54 A. Weiser, "douleuō k.t.l.," in *EDNT*, 1.350. He says the verb is used "in contrast to a personal partnership in marriage, it is used for an *absolute, servile obligation* in 1 Cor 7:15." (emphasis author's).

55 B. Byron, "1Cor 7:10-15: A Basis for Future Catholic Discipline on Marriage and Divorce," 431. According to D. Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians. Life in the Local Church*, BST, Leicester, Inter-Varsity Press, 1985, 128: "The dilemma still remains about the precise meaning of the phrase *is not bound* (lit. 'has not become a slave')."



in v. 11.<sup>56</sup> Canon 1143 envisages that "In virtue of the pauline privilege, a marriage entered into by two unbaptised persons is dissolved in favour of the faith of the party who received baptism, by the very fact that a new marriage is contracted by that same party, provided the unbaptised party departs." This new marriage is supposed to be with a catholic according to canon 1146. However, according to canon 1147, "the local Ordinary can for a grave reason allow the baptized party, using the Pauline privilege, to contract marriage with a non-catholic party, whether baptized or not; in this case, the provisions of the canons on mixed marriages must also be observed." This last canon seems to take into account the question we raised earlier under 2.a) where we examined who precisely did Paul imply when he addressed "the rest" (*hoi loipoi*) in v. 12. However, the same canon seems to give more scope to "the rest" (v. 12) than would have been envisaged by Paul in responding to the original situations, i) and ii) under 2.a).

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56 B. Byron, "1Cor 7:10-15: A Basis for Future Catholic Discipline on Marriage and Divorce," 430. However, A. C. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians. A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary*, 110, asks if there is on Paul's part "a realistic recognition that conflicting values may lead to 'irretrievable breakdown'?" But quite cautiously he says, "Whether this leaves the abandoned partner free to remarry remains a matter of debate among biblical specialists and theologians and in church doctrine." Even G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 303, after arguing that the theme of the chapter has to do with not seeking a change in status and that exceptions to the rule imply a change in status and not partners, concludes: "All of this is not to say that Paul *disallows* remarriage in such cases; he simply does not speak to it at all. Thus this text offers little help for this very real contemporary concern." (emphasis author's).

# Eating the Lord's Supper and Christian Unity (1 Cor 11:17-34)

James Kurianal

According to the author, sociological analysis suggests that the issue Paul addresses in 1 Cor 11:17-34 is primarily social cohesiveness and not theological dispute. It is a problem of social relationships going awry. Very simply there was no spirit of community in the group that gathered together to eat the Lord's Supper. So Paul is reminding them that while they have assembled "to eat the Lord's Supper," in fact they have turned it into "their own meal." The author analyzes important words and phrases such as *en tō phagein*; *prolambanō*; and *allēlous ekdechesthe* in the text under consideration and comes to the conclusion that what Paul imparts to the Corinthians is a powerful social message. The Eucharist attests to the celebration of the unity of the Church in Christ. Hence, every one at the celebration is called to "receive one another" so as to share food and drink. There are no have-nots at such a celebration. The Eucharist understood in this way is a powerful reminder of the unity to which we are called as Christians.

## Introduction

According to Acts of the Apostles, Paul founded the church in Corinth (Acts 18:10-17), and then spent approximately three years in Ephesus (Acts 19:8, 19:10, 20:31). The First Epistle to the Corinthians was written from Ephesus (16:8). The traditional subscription to the epistle, translated in the Authorized Version, states that this epistle was written at Philippi, perhaps arising from a misinterpretation of 16:5, "For I do pass through Macedonia," as meaning, "I am passing through Macedonia."<sup>1</sup>

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1 On the significance of the Book of Acts in the study on the I Corinthians, see T. Hilliard, A. Nobbs and B.W. Winter, "Acts and the Pauline Corpus I:

In 1Cor 16:8 Paul declares his intention of staying in Ephesus until Pentecost. This statement, in turn, is clearly reminiscent of Paul's Second Missionary Journey, when Paul traveled from Corinth to Ephesus, before going to Jerusalem for Pentecost (cf. Acts 18:22). Thus, it is possible that I Corinthians was written during Paul's first (brief) stay in the city of Ephesus in Asia Minor, at the end of his Second Journey. The letter was written during this time in Ephesus, sometime between 53 and 57 CE. Paul wrote this letter with his collaborator Sosthenes, to the Greek city of Corinth, where he had done missionary work between 50 and 52 CE, and where he could convert both Jews and Gentiles to the Christian faith.

## 1. Corinth and the Corinthians

A good picture of the Christian community's life in Corinth is absolutely necessary for understanding the first letter to the Corinthians. We do not know how many people made up the Corinthian Church at the time Paul wrote this letter. However, it is clear from this letter that the church of Corinth was a cross-section of the Corinthian society: some slaves, some wealthy, many ordinary. Those Christians had long been inhabitants of Corinth before they became Christians. Once they became Christians, these Corinthians did not abandon the culturally accepted ways of doing things in Corinth. They reacted to some of the issues that arose after Paul had left Corinth, on the basis of their cultural mores of Corinthian *Romanitas*.<sup>2</sup>

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Ancient Literary Parallels," in A.D. Clarke and B.W. Winter (eds.), *The Book of Acts in Its Ancient Literary Setting: The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*, Grand Rapids and Carlisle, W.B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., and Paternoster, 1993, I, ch. 8.

According to Pausanias, Greek Corinth was dismantled as a *polis* and destroyed in 146 B.C. (Pausanias 2.1.2. See also W. Willis, "Corinthusne deletus est?" *BZ* 35 (1991) 233-41; D.W.J. Gill, "Corinth: a Roman Colony in Achaea" *BZ* 37 (1993) 259-64). Then for 102 years Corinth remained a ruin without a political life (see C.K. Williams II, "The Refounding of Corinth: Some Roman Religious Attitude," in S. Macready and F.S. Thomson (eds.), *Roman Architecture in the Greek World*, London, The Society of Antiquaries, 1987, 26-37, here 26. When the colony was founded in 44 BCE, the whole of the site was laid out afresh according to the Roman town-planning grid called *centuriation* (see D.G. Romano, "Post-146 B.C. Land Use in Corinth, and Planning of the Roman Colony of 44 B.C.," in T.E. Gregory (ed.), *The Corinthia in the Roman Period*, JRASS 8, Ann Arbor, 1993a. In Corinth, the

*Romanitas* describes the architectural style of the first century Corinth, and it reflects an ideological outlook which provides a glimpse of Corinth's culture in Paul's day.<sup>3</sup> That is why Paul specifically charges the Corinthian Christians with "behaving according to human inclinations" (1Cor 3:3). In the subsequent chapters of this epistle, Paul is responding to the problems arising out of a Hellenistic-Roman culture that has taken root over centuries. G. Theissen has pointed out that the specific problems Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians are those that derive from a socially stratified community.<sup>4</sup> This letter touches the extremities of life and practice in an early Christian community born out of a pluralistic religious and social context, symbolizing to a large extent the life and struggles of the church through successive centuries. Thus, this letter and the problems addressed in this letter are relevant today as much as it was in the days of Paul.

## 2. A Corinthian Issue: The Celebration of the Eucharist

Paul is addressing issues that have arisen in the Corinthian Christian community after he had left Corinth.<sup>5</sup> In doing so, he takes up the problems within the Corinthian community one after another.<sup>6</sup> In

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reconstruction involved a Roman-style modernization. Corinth was named Colonia Laus Julia Corinthiensis. In effect, Corinth was not a Greek city with a Roman façade; but it was deliberately laid out as a thoroughly Roman colony.

- 3 B.W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change*, Cambridge, 2001, 11.
- 4 G. Theissen, "The Social Integration and Sacramental Activity: An Analysis of 1 Cor 11.17-34," in G. Theissen, *Essays on Corinth: The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1982, 145-174.
- 5 As a Roman colony Corinth was highly susceptible to the changes or trends in Rome. As Rome, the colony also was unstable, politically and socially as well. "Some of problems were results of Christians giving culturally determined responses to the ethical issues and their reactions to the social changes in Corinth." See B.W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, 7; S.E. Alcock, *Graecia Capta: The Landscapes of Roman Greece*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- 6 Kilgallon defines ten major issues that structure 1 Corinthians. See, J.J. Kilgallon, *First Corinthians: An Introduction and Study Guide*, New Jersey, Paulist Press, 1986.



chapter 11 the focus is on issues related to public worship. Here Paul urges the Corinthians to cleanse their public worship of its evils. In 1 Cor 11:2 Paul congratulates his flock: "I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions just as I handed them on to you." However, after having settled the issue regarding the attitude to be adopted by the women in the assemblies (11:3-16), Paul expresses his dissatisfaction with the way in which the Lord's Supper is being celebrated. In 11:17-34 he focuses on the issue of the abuse of Christian worship, namely "divisions" at the Lord's Supper (v. 18) viewed along the sociological lines (v. 22).<sup>7</sup>

The importance Paul gave to the Lord's Supper is evident from his words in 1 Cor 10:16-17: "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." That importance has been maintained and cherished throughout the course of Christian tradition. Particularly in the Catholic tradition, the Eucharist is at the very heart of its communal life. However, Paul says comparatively very little on the subject and what he does say is limited to two chapters in his Corinthian correspondence (1 Corinthians 10-11). Paul's discussion of the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians is adapted to the particular strains and stresses in Corinthian community which Paul was specifically addressing. Sociological analysis suggests that the issue Paul addresses in 1 Cor 11:17-34 is primarily social cohesiveness and not theological dispute.<sup>8</sup>

#### *a) The Celebration of the Eucharist in Corinth:*

##### *A Traditional Reconstruction*

The traditional Greco-Roman dinner party often took place in two phases, at two "tables"; the first one, during which several courses were served, would be followed by a break.<sup>9</sup> After the break would be the second phase, a symposium (drinking party) at the second table, often with newly arrived guests, at which some food and desserts

7 G.D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT, Grand Rapids, W.B. Eerdmans Publ., Co., 1991, 531.

8 G. Theissen, "The Social Integration and Sacramental Activity," 145-173.

9 J.D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, Grand Rapids, W.B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1998, 610.

were served. Based on this information, we may reconstruct the events lying behind the issues Paul addresses in 11:17ff. Just as the traditional Greco-Roman dinner party which often took place in two phases, the Eucharistic meal was also conceived of two meals: a regular meal of food and drink and the Eucharistic meal. The first one was held as a preparation for the second one. It is presumed that the problem Paul addresses in 1 Cor 11:17 is caused by the fact that the richer participants of the public worship considered the first table as having nothing to do with the Lord's Supper and only the second table as the Lord's Supper.<sup>10</sup> This could explain why some, presumed to be the rich, began to eat their own meals before others arrived. Paul's irate response that "If any one is hungry, let him eat at home" (11:34a) is meant to tell the Corinthian community that when they come for the Eucharist they ought to wait for one another.

**b) Difficulties with the Traditional Model:**

***A New Understanding Proposed***

B.W. Winter has pointed out a number of difficulties with the above reconstruction.<sup>11</sup> It is obscure how by waiting for one another, one overcomes the problem of the have-nots being hungry if, as Paul reports, each took with him his own dinner (11:21). Similarly, it is difficult to understand how those who had simply began eating their own meals ahead of the have-nots show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? In doing so how would the have-nots be put to shame? Does the suggestion in v. 34a absolve the rich from their responsibility toward the have-nots by separating the meal from the worship and making it only a memorial service?<sup>12</sup> Thus, the usual reconstruction of the situation raises more questions than it resolves.

For any reconstruction of the actual situation Paul is addressing in the text under consideration, a correct understanding of 11:21 is important. So we shall have a closer look at this verse. The NRSV translation of this verse runs as follows:

For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk.

10 J.D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 609-613.

11 B.W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, 142-158.

12 *Ibid.*, 143.

We have to see how far the above translation agrees with Greek text, and then how far it allows the above mentioned reconstruction of the events to lie behind the issues Paul addresses in 11:17ff.

*i. What the Greek expression en tō phagein implies*

We shall begin with the difficulties involved in the translation of the text. The Greek expression in v. 21 is rendered as the temporal clause "when the time comes to eat." Our contention is that the phrase *en tō phagein* refers to the eating of the Lord's Supper as a whole and not just to the eating of the agape which preceded the real Lord's Supper. BAGD<sup>13</sup> classifies Greek preposition *en* with the articular infinitive as introducing "an activity whose time is given – 'when,' 'while,' .... with the aorist infinitive the meaning is likewise 'when'."<sup>14</sup> We have to consider the significance of the aorist infinitive, *phagein*, in determining the meaning of the articular infinite under discussion. The significance of the aorist in such constructions is generally punctiliar and not durative. When an aorist implies a punctiliar sense, "it does not represent the initial or final point of the action ... A segment of time is involved, and it is the nature of this segment as a whole and its punctiliar character that evokes the use of the aorist."<sup>15</sup> Moulton says that *esthiein* by itself is durative in its force while *phagein* is constative.<sup>16</sup> So the phrase under consideration must be understood as referring to the Lord's Supper as a whole.

The immediate context of the phrase *en tō phagein* also supports the meaning we have suggested for it. Thus, the object of "eating" (*phagein*) in v. 21 is the same as that of the same verb in the previous verse, that is, the Lord's Supper. Therefore, the phrase *en tō phagein*

13 W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich and F. W. Danker (eds.), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1979. (=BAGD)

14 BAGD, s.v., *en*.

15 W.J. Martin, "1 Corinthians:1-16: An Interpretation", in W. Ward Gasque and R.P. Martin (eds), *Apostolic History and the Gospel*, Exeter, Paternoster, 1970, 235.

16 J. H. Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, 4 vols., Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1978, 1.111. For examples of this verb used in the durative sense, see LXX Lev. 22:16 and 2 Kg 4:40: while they were eating (*esthiein*) the stew, they cried out, "O man of God, there is death in the pot!"

implies “in eating the Lord’s dinner” or “during the eating of the Lord’s dinner.” This is further confirmed by the *gar* which connects v. 21 to the previous verse. Verse 20 and 21 are closely connected, both by structure and by the catch words “Dinner” and “eating.” The Lord’s Supper in v. 20 stands in contrast with “one’s own supper” in v. 21. They come to eat **the Lord’s Supper**. But in this eating, each one proceeds to eat **his own meals**. In v. 21, the particle *gar* (for) introduces the reason for the statement made in v. 20.<sup>17</sup> The context suggests that it was during the Lord’s Supper that each one went ahead with his own supper, and one went hungry and another became drunk. Otherwise, it could not be eating the bread or drinking the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner. The context requires that the verb *phagein* has the same object in both verses. So then it is evident that it was during the Lord’s Supper that each one took or devoured his or her own dinner.

ii. *How the verb prolambanō modifies  
the expression en tō phagein*

If the implied time reference of the phrase *en tō phagein* is to the whole duration of the Lord’s Supper as such, we have to ask the following question: Does verb *prolambanei* (v. 21) mean “go before” or “anticipate” in which case the wealthy were eating before others, or does it simply mean they “take”, that is “to eat”?

It is argued that the lexical evidences favor the former, but even so the point may not be that some poor people are arriving late, but that all are already present, the wealthy are being served first and are receiving the better portions and then the poor in the *atrium* get what is left over.<sup>18</sup> So we have to see how far the verb carries a temporal sense? In the contexts of eating, there are occurrences where the verb may carry temporal sense, but not always. In

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17 H.G. Liddell - R. Scott (eds.) *A Greek-English Lexicon, revised and augmented throughout* by H.S. Jones with a revised supplement, Oxford, 1996, s.v., I.

18 See M.- O’Connor, *St. Paul’s Corinth, Text and Archeology*, Wilmington, Delaware, Michael Glazier, 1983, 87. Murphy O’ Connor argues that the host who allowed his house to be used for the Christian worship must have been a wealthy member of the community. The first class believers were invited into the *triculium*, while the rest could take their places in the atrium where the conditions and the food quality were greatly inferior.



*Deipnosophists*, advice is given about overindulgence, and specifically concerning drinking of potent wine with meals. This text contains the following advice: "drink pure water before eating. If this too is troublesome, let him take before dinner (*prolambanetō*) some sweet wine. It also advised later that citron is to be eaten (*prolambanomenon*) before any food."<sup>19</sup>

In a second-century inscription, the same verb is used in the meaning *eating*; and it is without any temporal sense, that is, in the sense of "taking before." The inscription comes from the famous temple of Asclepius at Epidauros in Achaea. This inscription is a testimony of a healing by Marcus Julius Apellas, c. CE 160, and states that, "when I arrived at the temple he told me to keep my head covered for two days, and for these two days it rained; [he told me] to 'take, that is, to eat cheese and bread (*tupon kai arton prolabein*), celery with lettuce, to wash myself without help, to practice running to take [=eat] (*prolabein*) lemon peels and to soak them in water ...to take [=eat] (*prolabein*) milk with honey.' When one day I had drunk milk alone, he said, 'Put the honey in the milk so that it can get through'."<sup>20</sup> It is evident that in this inscription the verb *prolabein* is used without any temporal sense and simply means to "eat."

So also MM<sup>21</sup> and BAGD suggest that for the verb under discussion, the prefix *pro* had lost its temporal force by the first century. MM says, "One naturally thinks of 1 Corinthians 11:21, where no part of the point lies in the 'forestalling' of others: the gravamen of Paul's charge is that there was 'no Lord's Dinner to eat,' 'everyone devours *his own* supper at the meal'." So also BAGD says the following regarding the use of the same verb in 1 Cor 11:21, "where the temporal sense of the verb with its prefix *pro* is felt very little, if at all."

19 Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists*, 2.445c; 3.84.

20 W. Dittenberger (ed.), *Sylloge inscriptionum Graecarum*<sup>3</sup> 1170, II.7,9,16. See also E.J. and J. Eidelstein, *Asclepius: Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1998, no 432. See also B.W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, 145.

21 J.H. Moulton and G. Milligan, s.v. *prolambanō*, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament Illustrated from Papyri and other Literary Sources*, 1930. (= MM).

Winter notes the use of *lambanō* (11:23) for the “taking” of the bread on the part of Jesus. He poses the question, if “take” had simply been the meaning in 11:21, then why did not Paul use *lambanō* there also? He convincingly argues that in 11:24 *lambanō*<sup>22</sup> describes Jesus’ action of taking the bread before saying grace while the verb *prolambanō* in 11:21 describes the actual eating of the food by the Corinthians. The verb *lambanō* belongs to the group of verbs relating to the beginning of a meal with grace.<sup>23</sup> Theissen argues that the verb under discussion in 11:21 means “to receive.” According to him the rich at the Lord’s Dinner received a different quality and quantity of food from that of the poor. He assembles evidences for such practices of special treatment for the rich at the pagan festival.<sup>24</sup> However, there is no evidence to conclude that Paul is addressing such a problem in the Corinthian community. In Corinth, the problem was that of “each one goes ahead with his own supper,” (1Cor 11:21). Moreover, if the situation was that which Theissen reconstructs, it is difficult to understand how some are left hungry and the have-nots are humiliated. As Malherbe observes, “Theissen’s effort to interpret the situation is not always convincing.”<sup>25</sup>

So then, to conclude on the meaning of the verb *prolambanō*, we agree with Winter that the prefix *pro* strengthens the meaning of eating,<sup>26</sup> and choose to translate the verb as meaning *devours* as MM does it. In the Corinthian context, Paul is condemning their lack of charity in each one “taking” his or her own food at the dinner without any thought of sharing with those who had none. As Winter observes, “the pejorative sense of ‘devours’ seems to best fit the whole context.”<sup>27</sup> This is evident from both grammatical and

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22 Jeremias has shown that ‘*lambanō* belongs to those verbs which in a Semitic language describe, in a way which is cumbersome and superfluous for our idiom, a movement (or attitude) which is preparatory to the action on which the stress lies.’ See J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, London, SCM Press, 1966, 175.

23 B.W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, 147.

24 G. Theissen, “Social Integration and Sacramental Activity,” 153-155.

25 A.J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1977, 84.

26 B.W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, 148.

27 — *Ibid.*

philological considerations. It is because of their lack of charity and concern for others that the dinner at their gathering is no more the Lord's Dinner (11:20).

Again, in determining the meaning and implications of v. 21, we have to consider Paul's warning in v. 27: "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord." The warning is all about drinking the cup and eating the bread in unworthy manner. Their action in v. 21 amounts to eating the bread or drinking the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner.

V. 21 describes the evil that Paul addresses in 11:17ff.: everybody brought something, but when the assembled multitude began to take the meal, that is, to take the Lord's Supper, each one took what they had brought along and did not permit others, the poor, to eat from their meals. That was a violation of the character of a love feast (Jude 12; compare 2 Peter 2:13). The spirit of holiness was absent and the result was that the poor who had nothing brought with them were still hungry after the meals were over<sup>28</sup> and they were humiliated as well.

What Paul means in v. 22 is that if the Corinthian Christians were not able to maintain the character of the Lord's Supper as a meal of love, why did they come to the gathering at all? The rhetorical question formulated as it is, expects a positive reply. If their only purpose was to eat and drink, they could have done that at their respective homes. Thus the particle *gar* in v. 22 brings an ironical excuse: "What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?"<sup>29</sup> Paul points out that the Lord's Supper is a religious rite, and the purpose is not to satiate hunger and thirst. If any one has come to the gathering just to satisfy his hunger, he can do it at home. We learn from this rebuke, how Paul sees the Christian gathering and eating of the Lord's Supper. It is thoroughly distinct from the common feasts.

When Paul refers to the Lord's Supper at Corinth, he does not have in mind a liturgical celebration in a church building as we have it today. The Lord's Supper was an actual meal taken by the community in a private home. Paul makes no distinction between the

28 F.W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT, Grand Rapids, MI, W. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1979, 267.

29 H.G. Liddell - R. Scott, s.v, III,2.

agape and the Eucharist.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, it is evident that the sharing of the body and blood of Christ – bread and cup of the Lord’s Supper, occurred as part of a common meal. Otherwise, vv. 21-22 make no sense.

It is also evident that the problem that Paul is addressing in the text under consideration is not a problem of sacramental theology. Rather, it is a problem of social relationships going awry. Very simply there was no spirit of community in the group that gathered together to eat the Lord’s Supper. So Paul is reminding them that while they have assembled “to eat the Lord’s Supper,” in fact they have turned it into “their own meal.”

*iii. The significance of the expression allēlous ekdechesthe*

However, the text does not agree with the suggestion that, the more privileged members expect to receive more and better food than others, and that Paul regards this as a humiliation for the community and as an abuse of the Supper of the Lord, whose own example contradicts such status division.<sup>31</sup> Rather, we have to give due consideration to the expression “each of you goes ahead with your own supper.” Therefore the meals that they took were not something that was given to them because of their social status. Paul was always against any special treatment to the rich and socially higher classes. This is further evinced by the solution Paul suggests to the problem. This we have in v. 33: “So then, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.” Here the Greek text behind the expression “wait for one another” is *allēlous ekdechesthe*. To understand Paul’s solution to the problem, we have to understand the exact meaning of this expression.

NRSV translates this phrase as “wait for one another.” However, it is difficult to understand how waiting for one another would resolve the specific problem of the Corinthian community, as mentioned in v. 21, that “in eating, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk.” Here, one getting drunk and the other going hungry are referred to as simultaneous actions. That means while some are getting drunk, some are going

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30 R.B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation, Louisville, John Knox Press, 1997, 193.

31 *Ibid.*, 193f.



hungry. There is no implication that those who are hungry are so at a later time than those getting drunk.

So, naturally Paul's solution must be to this precise problem. A closer observation of the phrase would show that Paul's answer to the issue is different than what is generally thought of, namely "to wait for one another." For a better understanding of the phrase, we have to understand the nuances of the verb *ekdechomai*. The only other occurrence of the verb *ekdechomai* in the Pauline corpus is in 1 Cor 16:11, where Paul is "expecting" Timothy. Here Paul's expectation is to receive Timothy. Moreover, the expectation involved here is of a future event. In the context of the 11:21, the solution suggested in 11:33 is not to be understood in the future sense.

We have to consider whether the verb under consideration has any other meaning. In the LXX, the verb *dechomai* and most of its composite forms including *ekdechomai* are used to express the concept of hospitality. Thus for example 3 Macc 5:26 has the following expression where the verb under consideration has the meaning of "receiving (of guests)": "While the king was receiving (*ekdechomenou*) his friends, ..."

In the papyri, the same word is used for *receiving* an official which included the provision of food (p.Tebt.33:1.7). W. Grundmann says, "*ekdechomai* has the two meanings a) to *accept, to receive* (as *dechomai*) and b) to *await*."<sup>32</sup> W. Grundmann draws attention to its use in the sense of "receiving others."<sup>33</sup>

Thus the verb *ekdechomai* is used in the literary sources, including LXX and in the nonliterary sources with the meaning of *receiving* and *sharing*. In 1 Cor 11:33 if the phrase *allelous ekdechesthe* is understood in the sense of "receive one another" so as to share food and drink, it resolves many of the difficulties which are otherwise not taken care of by the usual rendering "waiting for one another."

We can see how well this meaning suits in resolving the issues Paul had earlier outlined in v. 21, that "when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk." (11:21).<sup>34</sup> When the time comes to

32 W. Grundmann, "dechomai k.t.l.," in *TDNT*, 2.51.

33 *Ibid.*, where one may look for its uses also in the literary sources.

34 B.W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, 151.

eat, it is not by *waiting for one another*, that they have to resolve the problem of each taking his own meals but by *sharing it with one another* so that the have-nots are not embarrassed by being left hungry.

*iv. The reason for the words of Institution*

Winter suggests that "Paul's purpose in quoting the words of Institution was not simply to repeat a tradition that he had already received and handed over to them, but rather to explain why that tradition did not endorse their conduct but condemned it."<sup>35</sup> This purpose of Paul in quoting the words of Institution is made clear in that Paul rearranges the word order of the tradition which he received. Thus the Pauline text has the following: "This of mine is the body (given up) on your behalf." Here the Greek word *touto*, translated as "this," is neuter and therefore cannot refer to the bread which is masculine in Greek. The Pauline use of the neuter demonstrative pronoun in similar situations indicates<sup>36</sup> that this demonstrative pronoun refers to the action of Jesus and not to the bread.

All these cumulative evidences show that the reconstruction of the events lying behind v. 21 should be the following: When they gathered<sup>37</sup> to eat the Lord's Supper each one was eating his or her own meals without sharing it with the have-nots. That is why the have-nots were left humiliated and hungry. The Eucharist attests to the celebration of the unity of the Church in Christ.

## Conclusion

From the Apostolic time onwards the celebration of the Lord's

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35 *Ibid.*, 154.

36 See for example, 1 Cor 6:6; 9:17; See B.W. Winter, *After Paul left Corinth*, 153, note 28.

37 In 11:17-34 the phrase coming together occurs five times. What does this coming together imply? It refers to the gatherings of the Christians for public worship. We can picture the scene as follows: At end of the day, after their works having been completed they come together, usually in the house of one of their members. It worth noting that Paul uses the expression "coming together" (*sunerchomai*) five times in 1 Cor 11:17-14: these occurrences concentrate at the beginning and end of the section. It shows the importance of the "coming together" for the community. "When you come together it is not for the better but for the worse" (11:17); "For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you" (11:18);

Supper has been the focal point of all Christian worship.<sup>38</sup> Paul, in his response to the Corinthian issue involved in the gathering to eat the Lord's Supper, elucidates the socio-ethical significance of the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Paul's handling of the problem has an enduring significance for the church in all ages. In this celebration we all participate in the same body and blood of Jesus Christ. Eucharist is the place where we celebrate our unity in Christ and it in fact creates this unity. Unfortunately often, this unity is forgotten and easily neglected. This call for unity is one that permeates throughout the New Testament.<sup>39</sup> Thus for example, in John 13:34 we have the following: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another." In John 15:12, Jesus' own love is given as the basis and model for the disciple's love for one another. Jesus' love is given as the paradigm for the disciples to follow (see also John 15:12-17). Church's claim "to be a people brought into the unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (LG 4) must find its expression in the unity and mutual love of the Christian community. The communitarian dimension of the Eucharist as sharing in one body<sup>40</sup> is crystal clear in Paul's own words: "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." (1 Cor 10:16-17).

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"When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper" (11:20); "When you come together to eat, wait for one another" (11:33); "If you are hungry, eat at home, so that when you come together, it will not be for your condemnation" (11:34). Evidently, the coming together constituted them as the Church.

38 S.K. Parmar, "Eucharist," *NCCR* LXVI (1996) 370-73.

39 Jn 15:12,17; Rom 12:10; 13:8; 1Pet 1:22; 1Jn 3:11, 14, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; 2Jn 1:5.

40 For a more detailed discussion on this see D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul*, 615-20.

# **Bodily Resurrection: A Theological Reflection from the Perspective of 1 Cor 15: 12-58**

**John Peter S.**

The author attempts to present 1 Cor 15 as a powerful discourse which treats of the "theology of the resurrection of the dead." The entire belief of Christians must be anchored on the truth of the resurrection of Jesus. The argument of Paul is very emphatic that if Christ has not been raised from the dead, then everything based on that belief collapses. Using the examples from the process of nature, Paul clarifies the notion of the resurrection of the body. From the question of "Resurrection," he focuses on the modality of the resurrection. Questions such as "how are the dead raised?" and, "what type of body does one get?" intrigue people even today even as faith in the eternal life is being seriously threatened by the contemporary cultural and theological context. The consumerist world of secularism seems to be denying a life after death and for many life goes on as if there were nothing to wait for after death. When faced with such agnosticism, Paul tells us there is our own bodily resurrection.

## **Introduction**

The people at Corinth were confused, doubted and questioned if anyone could really be raised from the dead? Although they did not deny the resurrection of Jesus, they still doubted that the bodies of the believers would be raised. The question regarding the resurrection of the dead was perhaps more of Greek than Jewish origin<sup>1</sup> because the Corinthian Church was mainly a Gentile church. Some others

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1 A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, ICC, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1911, 329.



feel that this problem of the denial of resurrection (v.12) was the manifestation of "realized eschatology (Col 2:6-12)."<sup>2</sup> It means to say that they were not actually denying the resurrection; rather they were claiming to have attained it already. For example "Hymenaeus and Philetus claimed that the resurrection had already taken place" (2 Tim 2: 17-18). Hence the question is not about the resurrection of the dead but of the bodily resurrection. Paul has reminded the Corinthians that "the body is meant...for the Lord and the Lord for the body and God raised the Lord and will raise us by His Power" (1Cor 6:13-14). One thing is sure that the entire chapter fifteen of the first letter to the Corinthians is a "self-contained treatise" on the resurrection of the dead.<sup>3</sup> In other words, it is a discrete, "stand-alone" pericope that can be considered independent of its immediate context in the epistle. This is less problematic than assuming that Paul kept this issue until the end of his letter "because of its vital importance."<sup>4</sup>

Judging by the way various subjects are introduced in the letter one gets the clue that 1 Corinthians may be a composite epistle, edited from two or more originally separate pieces of correspondence. Of the ten or eleven problems treated in this letter (issues concerning divisions in the Church 1:10-17; 3:1-23; sexual immorality 5:1-13; concerning marriage 7:1-16; concerning virgins 7:25-31; food offered to the idols 8:1-13; problems regarding the women covering their

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- 2 Normally the scholars agree that the eschatology of Paul is future oriented. However, the letter of Paul to Colossians is characterized as "realized eschatology." For further reading: R.E. Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament*, New York, Doubleday, 1997, 612. However, T. D. Still argues that as in Col 2:2-10, they received Jesus as Lord, placed their faith in Him, delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of God's beloved Son (Col 1:13). Hence it is "already and not yet." See T. D. Still, "Eschatology in Colossians: How Realized Is It," *NTS* 50 (2004) 125-138, esp. 125. Also, A. C. Thiselton, "Realized Eschatology at Corinth," *NTS* 24 (1977) 510-526, esp. 510. R. B. Hays, *First Corinthians, Interpretation: a Bible Commentary*, Louisville, John Knox Press, 1997, 252.
  - 3 H. Conzelmann, *1Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Hermeneia, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1975, 249.
  - 4 M. J. Borg, "The Irrelevancy of the Empty Tomb," in Paul Copan (ed.), *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?*, Grand Rapids, Baker, 1998, 122-123.

heads during worship 11:2-16; abuse at the Lord's supper 11:17-33 and the bodily resurrection in 15:12-58), five are introduced with the phrase "now concerning." This suggests that Paul learned of these issues from written correspondence he had received directly from the Corinthian congregation (1Cor 7:1: "now concerning the things about which you wrote"). Paul himself mentions that certain things specially the quarrels among them are reported to him by Chloe's people (1Cor 1:11). The fact is that, according to the first Christians the full, genuine life of the resurrection is inconceivable apart from the new body, the "spiritual body," with which the dead will be clothed when heaven and earth are re-created.

### 1. The Structure of 1Cor 15

The entire chapter 15 could be outlined as follows:

a) The Resurrection of the Dead is the Essential Message of the Gospel (vv. 1-34)

i. *Kerygma proclaimed the Resurrection of Christ (vv.1-11)*

ii. *Denial of it negates the gospel (vv.12-19)*

iii. *Because Christ was raised, we will also be raised (vv. 20-28)*

iv. *Otherwise our hope is pointless (vv. 29-34)*

b) Resurrection Means Transformation of the Body (vv. 35-57)

i. *What is the nature of the risen body (vv. 35-49)*

ii. *The living and the dead will be transformed ( vv. 50-57)*

c) Therefore our Labour is not in vain (v. 58)

As Barth commented, "this chapter forms not only as the crown of the entire epistle but also provides the key to its meaning from which the light is shed to the whole and it becomes intelligible."<sup>5</sup> The commentators agree that the first eleven verses do not seem to take the form of "a reply" to the question the author begins with; but the problem is clearly identified only in v.12. It is not that the Corinthians

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5 K. Barth, *Resurrection of the Dead*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1933, 11. For the discussion about "the Resurrection of the dead" between K. Barth and R. Bultmann read C. Janssen, "Bodily Resurrection 1 Cor 15?: The Discussion of the Resurrection in K. Barth and R. Bultmann, D. Sölle and Contemporary Feminist Theology," *JSNT* 79 (2000) 61-78.

denied their belief in resurrection rather they were influenced by the Philosophy of Epicureans in the Graeco-Roman world. Combined with the tradition of the Sadducees, they were only reluctant to accept the fact that there is life after death. It could probably be ruled out that the Corinthians were influenced by "Gnosticism" as early as in 55 CE. In this article we do not enter into a discussion on this dispute as so much of study has been done, rather we attempt to present 1 Cor 15 as a powerful discourse which treats of the "theology of the resurrection of the dead."

## 2. The Probable Reasons for the Denial

Already in 1 Cor 7:1 Paul begins to respond to diverse issues raised by the community at Corinth. In Chapter 15 Paul articulates his view in opposition to "some" who questioned the fact of the "resurrection of the dead." Scholars differ in their opinions as to why there was a denial on the issue. We could perhaps group them under four main opinions: a) Probably the Corinthians did not believe in the life after death;<sup>6</sup> b) Some of the Corinthians believed that only those who live at the time of *Parousia* would participate in the life of the new age. Therefore, those who had died before the *Parousia* had completely lost it;<sup>7</sup> c) Another view is that the Corinthians did not exactly deny a life after death, but they did not understand the notion of a bodily resurrection; d) Or perhaps the Corinthians were under the influence of Gnostic anthropology and believed that they had been already transferred into the world of the Spirit (*pneuma*) through Baptism.<sup>8</sup> However, Paul takes the opportunity to give them the theology of the "resurrection of the dead," as deriving from the very reason why the gospel was proclaimed to them.

## 3. The *Kerygma* Concerning the Resurrection of Christ

Keeping in mind the doubts raised by "some" (v. 12b) in the Corinthian community, Paul bases his argument beginning with the

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6 A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 346ff.

7 H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 262.

8 M. C. de Boer, *The Defeat of Death: Apocalyptic Eschatology in 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5*, JSNTSS 22, London, Billing & Sons, 1988, 96-97.

faith proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus. One of the most recurring claims leveled by modern exegetes against the historicity of the bodily resurrection of Jesus has been the pre-Pauline creed in 1 Cor 15:3-7. At best it implies that Jesus' earliest disciples believed in a spiritual resurrection. Two lines of argument are normally given in support of this premise: a) Since Paul employs the same Greek verb (*paredōka* - delivered and *parelabon* - received) as the tradition, to describe his visionary experience of the risen Christ, Paul's experience was the same in character as that of the preceding disciples; b) The formula contains no mention of the empty tomb, thereby suggesting that the corpse of Jesus was irrelevant to the concept of His resurrection held by the Jerusalem church. Such an understanding of the resurrection was shared by Paul, as displayed in his contrast between the physical and spiritual bodies (1 Cor 15:44). However, the understanding about the resurrection of Jesus evolved during the second Christian generation into a doctrine of physical resurrection featured in the Gospel appearance narratives. Form criticism has established that in 1 Cor 15:3-7 Paul quotes a primitive Christian creed originally formulated during the earliest years of the Jesus movement.<sup>9</sup> Although scholars differ concerning its precise length, there has emerged a consensus that at least vv. 3b-5 belong to the ancient tradition based on the following linguistic data.

Paul begins the chapter by reminding them of gospel that he originally preached to them (vv. 1, 3). Already in 11:23 while speaking about the Lord's Supper tradition he speaks about the same "handing on" and "receiving" the tradition. Here again Paul quotes the tradition he received in vv. 5-7 which shows that this was an early formula of confession he received (*paredōka ... kai parelabon*). He reminds them that "the resurrection of the dead" is not only a matter of "first importance" rather an integral part of the good news (*evangelion*) on which the believers take their stand v. 1; Gal 1:11.

It is worth noting that the confession formula in vv. 4-5 contains 4 clauses:

- a) that Christ died for our sins *in accordance with the Scriptures*
- b) and that He was buried

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9 R. H. Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives*, London, SPCK, 1972, 10-11.



c) and that he was raised on the third day *in accordance with the Scriptures*

d) and that he appeared to *Cephas*, then to the twelve

Both the central events of Christ, namely the death and resurrection have taken place in accordance with the Scriptures. Hence the meaning of these events must be found in their relation to the Law and Prophets and to realize the continuation and fulfillment of God's dealing with His people (Rom 1:2; 3:21 = Lk 24: 44-47). And the appearance of the Risen Lord to *Cephas* (v. 5), and then to the twelve and then to more than five hundred brethren at one time (v. 6), strengthen the narration of the resurrection. It was God who raised Jesus from the dead; the passive form of the verb "was raised" (*egēgertai*) stands in contrast to the perfect tense "died" (*apethanen*) and was "buried" (*etaphē*). The perfect tense indicates that He remains risen and if anyone doubts this act of God, he/she would be challenged by the gallery of the twelve apostles along with 500 people who remain witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus (v. 6), most of them still alive during the time when Paul wrote this letter. It proves to say that historical living witness was available to anyone who doubted the testimony of Paul. And a still stronger witness which Paul includes is that of James, the brother of Jesus, a well known leader of the church at Jerusalem (Gal 1:19; 2:9, 12; Acts 15:13-21), and of all the apostles (Rom 16:7; Acts 14:14), thus enlarging the range of witnesses. St. Peter attested to this fact that "this Jesus, God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses" (Acts 2:32).<sup>10</sup> It is surprising, however, that Paul does not even worry about the women who were first witnesses of the resurrection (Mt 28:9-11; Jn 20: 11-18). It means to say that Paul supplements the *Kerygmatic* formula with other witnesses known to him. Paul himself agrees that this is a public knowledge, testifying before the King Agrippa (Acts 26:23-26). Based on this message proclaimed, Paul warns the "Corinthian" community that their questioning or their denial of the resurrection of

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10 Regarding the witness list some scholars suggest that it stands for 2 different traditions: i. Peter and the twelve and ii. James and the Apostles. See G. Fee, *The First Epistle to Corinthians*, Grand Rapids, W.B Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1991, 729; also A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 343.

the dead would be absurd to their own experience or the gospel itself. To doubt the resurrection would be disastrous.<sup>11</sup>

#### 4. If Christ is Risen, so the “Dead” in Christ also will Rise

The Corinthians, who were probably much influenced by Greek philosophy, had in their mind that the “rational soul” would escape from the body, which they viewed as a dark tomb.<sup>12</sup> Paul reacts to their skepticism with an outrage. He contends that those who deny that God has power to raise Jesus from the dead, place themselves in contradiction to the gospel proclaimed. He enlists their doubts with disastrous consequence;

If Christ has not been raised

Our proclamation is in vain (v. 14)

*Result:* we are false witnesses (v. 15)

Your faith is in vain (v.14) and futile (v.17)

*Result:* You are still in your sins (v. 17)

Those who died in Christ are lost (v. 18)

The entire belief of Christians must be anchored on the truth of the resurrection of Jesus. Paul’s argument is “if Jesus is risen others can also rise.”<sup>13</sup> The denial of this fact would only mean, “others will not and can not rise,” and it would point to logically that “Christ has not been raised” (*oude Christos egēgertai*) (v. 13), in which case the preaching is in vain and their faith is also in vain v. 14. The argument of Paul is very emphatic that if Christ has not been raised from the dead, then everything based on that belief collapses.

#### a) *Nature of the Resurrection of the Body*

Using the examples from the process of nature Paul clarifies the notion of the resurrection of the body. From the question of “Resurrection,” now the focus is on the modality of the resurrection. The main objection for the community at Corinth, according to Hays, was based “on the aversion to the idea that the body could be

11 J. Philips, *Exploring I Corinthians: an Expository Commentary*, Grand Rapids, Kregel, 2002, 332.

12 R.B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, 259.

13 *Ibid.*, 260.

reanimated after death.”<sup>14</sup> For the question: how are the dead raised? And what type of body one gets? These are the questions that people even today keep pondering over. Paul emphatically brings out the transformation that takes place at the eschatological resurrection. “What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. But God gives it a body as he has chosen and to each kind of seed its own body (vv. 36- 38). As J. Gillman argues on the basis of this text, nature’s example of a seed illustrates the necessity of death, its transformation and coming to life.<sup>15</sup> However, Sobanaraj<sup>16</sup> based on the argument of Witherington holds the opinion that Paul perhaps used the widely believed idea to make a point about the resurrection and not to teach anything on agriculture. We need to understand that resurrection does not mean that the dead are re-animated or corpses resuscitated. Who on earth wants to get back to the same old-aged body if some one died at the age of 90 and above? One needs to make it clear that beneath the doubts of the Corinthians, there was an anthropological presupposition: the immortality of the soul versus bodily resurrection. If a new plant has to emerge, the seed has to die first. Between the death of a seed and the emergence of a new life there exists an organic continuity. Hence Paul demonstrates that death is a precondition of life or of the possibility of life proceeding from death. From the analogy of the “seed- and the new plant” one has to understand the “creative power of God.”<sup>17</sup> This example of seed and the plant is given not as a parallel to the resurrection but as a way of illustrating the effectual power of God in the generation of life. The

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14 *Ibid.*, 269.

15 J. Gillman, “A Thematic Comparison of 1 Cor 15: 50-57 and 2 Cor 5:1-5,” *JBL* 107 (1988) 439- 454, esp. 443.

16 S. Sobanaraj, *Diversity in Paul’s Eschatology: Paul’s View on the Parousia and Bodily Resurrection*, Delhi, ISPCK, 2007, 220-225. Witherington remarks that by this example from the seed and the plant Paul aimed at making the point clear regarding “how and what of resurrection.” See for the further reading on this: B. Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, Exeter, Paternoster, 1994, 307-310.

17 J. Asher, “*Speiretai*: Paul’s Anthropogenic Metaphor in 1 Cor 15:42-44,” *JBL* 120 (2001) 101- 122, esp. 107. For further discussion on this subject see also. S. Sobanaraj, *Diversity in Paul’s Eschatology*, 224-225.

simple example of a seed only demonstrates that only when a seed dies a new life emerges. One can notice clearly “discontinuity (seed dies) and continuity (a new life springs).”<sup>18</sup> Even when the new life springs from the seed, there exists a close connection between the seed and the plant. And this relationship is mysterious. Though there is a biological process taking place between the time the seed is sown and the new life springs, no one knows how a new life springs from the seed. Giving life is certainly and ultimately the creative work of God and no human power can comprehend this mystery.

With this simple example Paul shows that God authors a new resurrected body as a sown seed brings forth a new plant. If the process of germination takes place according to the divine plan, so also resurrection occurs to each believer: each one receives his or her own distinct body. Since God determines the form of the plant, so also, it is God who determines the nature of the body one gets at the resurrection. Hence “there is no need to suppose that belief in the resurrection of the body means resuscitation of the old corpse.”<sup>19</sup> The theology of Paul is very clear in this section. As there is a “discontinuity and continuity” between “Seed and Plant,” so also there is discontinuity at death of a physical body and the continuity of the life after death which continues even after the *Parousia*. Paul’s interests do lie in his emphasis on the “continuity” of the human soul or personality, as J. Francis<sup>20</sup> suggests that it is the divine wonder of the change that remains uppermost in the life giving aspect.

***b) With What Kind of Body Do We Share the Glory?***

As there is a mystery surrounding the germination of the seed, a mystery also surrounds the resurrection. If God can transform the grain and make it something different, He can also grant such a transformation to the human beings. From the analogy of “seed and plant,” Paul argues that “discontinuity and continuity” are not incompatible. It is God who miraculously clothes the seed with a new

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18 H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 281.

19 S. Sobanaraj, *Diversity in Paul’s Eschatology*, 226.

20 J. Francis, *Come Lord Jesus Come*, GBS 5, Bangalore, St. Peter’s Pontifical Institute, 2002.



body, green leaves and makes it thriving.<sup>21</sup> In the same way the body that dies is not the same body that God raises. Hence God will transform us into a body, clothed with glory through the same creative power that gives life to the seed. However, there is a difference in the sharing of glory. Paul uses another example from the celestial nature to explain this mystery in vv. 39-41.

There is a chiastic structure in these verses (vv. 39-41).

A. Not all flesh is the same flesh

B. There is a different kind for human beings

a. different kind of flesh for animals

b. different kind of flesh for birds

c. different kind of flesh for fish

C. There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies

The glory of heavenly bodies is different from that of earthly

B<sup>1</sup> There is different kind of glory (*doxa*)<sup>22</sup> for the Sun

different kind of glory (*doxa*) for the Moon

different kind of glory (*doxa*) for the Stars

A<sup>1</sup> For the glory differs from Star to Star<sup>23</sup>

With this illustration, Paul insists that there is a gradation of glory already in the celestial beings. The blazing of the sun, the soft glow

21 It is a general belief among the Greeks that the seeds spring to life and not die. See D. E. Garland, *First Corinthians*, Michigan, Baker Academic, 2003, 730. See also M.D. Goulder, *Paul and the Competing Mission in Corinth*, Peabody, Mass., Hendrickson, 2001, 191.

22 The word *doxa* is used to designate various levels of glory. Paul used it here to designate the glory of the Sun, Moon and the Stars; Peter used it to refer the glory at the transfiguration 2 Pet 1: 17; and elsewhere in NT it refers to the supernatural glory flowing from God Lk 2:9, Acts 22: 11; it also refers to the glory in the pillar of cloud. All these ideas cluster around our resurrection when our bodies are to be raised in glory – *egeiretai en doxa*. See J. Phillips, *Exploring I Corinthians*, 376.

23 D.E. Garland, *First Corinthians*, 730, also G. Fee, *The First Epistle to Corinthians*, 783.

of the moon and the twinkling of the stars – all these show a descending order of radiance. The “earthly” is characterized by “flesh” and the “heavenly” is characterized by “glory.” We can notice that, in the Creation God differentiates between various kinds of flesh, one that is appropriate for the animals, another for the birds, yet another for the fish. There exists an infinite variety in the world that God has created. Paul insists that the Corinthians should acknowledge that heavenly bodies are different from the earthly bodies. If God could provide an appropriate body for each, he certainly provides an appropriate body for those who are raised. What this body will be and the nature of its glory, are beyond our human comprehension. However it is not absurd to human knowledge to think that the risen will exist in an altogether different body.

It can be explained further in this way. In the Greco-Roman world they used the term *speiretai* for sowing. It denoted the generation of life. It is also meant to be used in the context of procreation of humans (Gen 9:19) and later applied to human existence in general. Now Paul uses this term *speiretai* and refers it to the state of humanity beginning from Adam (the body – *soma*). What is sown (*speiretai*) is sown in dishonor, in weakness, in a physical body v. 43a, 44a; it is raised (*egeiretai*) in power, in glory, in a spiritual body (43, 44b). Here, Paul brings a contrast between the offspring of Adam and Christ. Paul believed in the possibility of a transformation of the *soma*. As C.F.D Moule<sup>24</sup> points out, our body is a death laden body (Rom 7:24); it is mortal (Rom 8:10ff); perishable (1 Cor 15:50, 53) and it is a humiliated body (Phil 3:21), but it is *capable of being transformed* into an imperishable, spiritual and glorious body (Phil 3:21b). Hence what is sown in physical body is kindled by the soul – *soma psychikon*; and what is raised is kindled by the Spirit – *soma pneumatikon*. As D.E. Garland remarks,

Those who are raised will be given spiritual bodies, ones animated by the spirit of God and bearing the image of the heavenly person. The spiritual body is a body ‘that eye has not seen and ear has not heard and has not entered the human mind’ (1 Cor 2:9) and that is transformed into the likeness of

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24 C.F.D. Moule, “St. Paul and Dualism: The Pauline Conception of Resurrection,” *NTS* 12 (1965) 106-123, esp.108.

Christ (Phil 3:21) and that is fitted for the new age. All of this is possible only by the Power of God.<sup>25</sup>

Christ is able to transfigure our humiliating and humiliated bodies into bodies like His own glorious body; it is part of God's triumphant act of conquest in Jesus Christ (Rom 6:4; 1 Cor 15:26ff).

Here Paul's argument concerns the doubt of the Corinthians as to how an earthly (terrestrial) body which is corruptible could be raised as a heavenly body (celestial) which is incorruptible. To put it in simple terms, if human existence came in through Adam, sown with a body made from dust and returning to dust, so also the Christians, who are baptized, will take the shape of Christ in their heavenly existence with a spiritual body which is required for celestial habitat. Although, "flesh and blood" cannot inherit the kingdom of God (v. 50), yet our future life has to be "embodied" in some form, that is what Paul defines as "spiritual body," a different body, a body raised up by God suitable for glory. The same point is clarified better by Paul in his letter to Philippians:

But our citizenship is in heaven and it is from there that we are expecting a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliations that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to him (Phil 3: 20-21).

Therefore, the transformation of our bodies is an eschatological event, a future resurrection associated with the *Parousia* of Jesus Christ. We will all have a body "similar" to that of the Risen Lord, that is to say, a body that is suitable to the spiritual condition of the new life as a material body is for the present physical condition.<sup>26</sup> However, this transformation has not yet occurred (v. 49) but it lies in the future at the resurrection. Till then, we as humans bear the image of the person of dust - Adam, and after the resurrection we will bear the image of heavenly person. Those in Christ will be made like Christ, with spiritual bodies appropriate for the new existence. Till then, we should be steadfast (*hedraios*- meaning remain seated), unmoveable (*ametakinetos* - be firm) and always abounding

25 D.E. Garland, *First Corinthians*, 734.

26 A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 375.



(*perisseuein* - to excel) in the work of the Lord, knowing that our labour is not in vain (v. 58).

### 5. Whither Eschatology Today!

The life of Christians is the life of hope accepting all the implications of social relationships and the realities. We die to be reborn to a new life. Our faith in the everlasting life is seriously threatened by the contemporary cultural and theological context. The consumeristic world of secularism seems to be fixing its gaze only on the life here. Life goes on for many as if there were nothing existing after death. We can summarize our reflection in the following points:

a) The resurrection of Jesus is the model of our resurrection. Since Jesus has risen from the dead so we too will be raised. The Resurrection is not a return to the conditions of earthly existence, not even re-animation. Rather, "this body which is now shaped by the soul (*psyche*) will be shaped in the glorious resurrection by the Spirit"<sup>27</sup> (*pneuma*). To sum up, in the words of St. Paul, "as the heavenly bodies possess varying degrees of glory (*doxa*), our bodies also share the glory accordingly" (1Cor 15: 40).

b) We need to accept the fact that God has the full knowledge of the past, present and future. And He has revealed His eternal plan to us through His Son. Hence our knowledge of the future resurrection should be based on the resurrection of Jesus Himself. Therefore, our understanding of eternal life is a life of communion with God in Christ through the Spirit. And this is the teaching of the Church and the firm belief of the Fathers of the Church which is expressed in our Creed.

c) There is continuity between the life here on earth, and the life after the death and resurrection to everlasting life. However, resurrection is not possible without death. The Pauline reflections and his challenges to the people at Corinth have been given in nutshell in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.<sup>28</sup>

### Conclusion

We close this article with a synopsis of its principal findings. Paul

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27 P. C. Phan, "Current Theology: Contemporary Context and Issues in Eschatology," *TS* 55 (1994) 507-537, esp. 508.

28 *Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae*, Citta del Vaticana, Liberia Editrice, 1994; E.Trans. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Bangalore, Theological Publications in India, 1994, reprint 1995. See CCC 988-991; 1002-1007.



attempted to convey a twofold perspective as response to the claim of Corinthians concerning “realized eschatology.” They are: i) The Corinthians must look to the future against their belief in realized eschatology. Paul opens their horizons towards a destiny not yet achieved. He emphasized it wholly with the resurrection of Christ. It is the basis of the argument for the remainder of this chapter. The transition is made in v. 20, which stresses the fact that Christ constitutes the first fruits (*aparchē*) of the resurrection harvest that is yet to be raised in the future, that is, of those who belong to Christ (v. 23). Moreover, death must precede the resurrection (v. 36), and when it occurs, it will entail a transformed mode of existence of glory. This moment of transformation lies in the future. ii) Secondly, the Corinthians must look to the sovereign work of God and not to their own distorted notion of “the spirit.” If God has raised Jesus from the dead, then God can raise others from the “dead” as well.

Only God has the power to bring resurrection transformation. There is no question of humanity having the ability to comprehend this fact (v. 35), rather it needs faith to realize that the God who created the universe has the resource and resourcefulness to provide what is needed after the death. One needs to perceive the “sovereign power of God.” Paul gives a fitting conclusion with these words, “He who has rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us; on him we have set our hope that he will rescue us again” (2 Cor 1:10). The theology of the resurrection affirms our hope and determines our Christian identity today and sets our lives in the light of the kingdom of God. Otherwise there will not be any meaning for our struggle and endurance. The tension between the “already” and “not yet” keeps our lives going and extends our hope beyond the horizons of this present world. One needs to remember that the activities in the world are not unconnected with the coming Kingdom of God. There is no eschatology of the future without eschatology of the present: borrowing on the words of St. Peter, we can conclude: “always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet 3:15).

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### Abbreviations

ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentary
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentary
BST	The Bible Speaks Today
BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
EDNT	<i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , 3 Vols., H. Balz and G. Schneider (eds.)
GBS	Guide Book Series, Bangalore
ICC	The International Critical Commentary
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JRASS	Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSS	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
LvSt	<i>Louvain Studies</i>
NCCRev	<i>National Council of Churches Review</i> , Delhi
NIB	<i>The New Interpreter's Bible</i> , 12 Vols.
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIDNTT	<i>The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i> , 3 Vols., C. Brown (ed.)
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra Pagina
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , 10 Vols., G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (eds.)
TS	<i>Theological Studies</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary